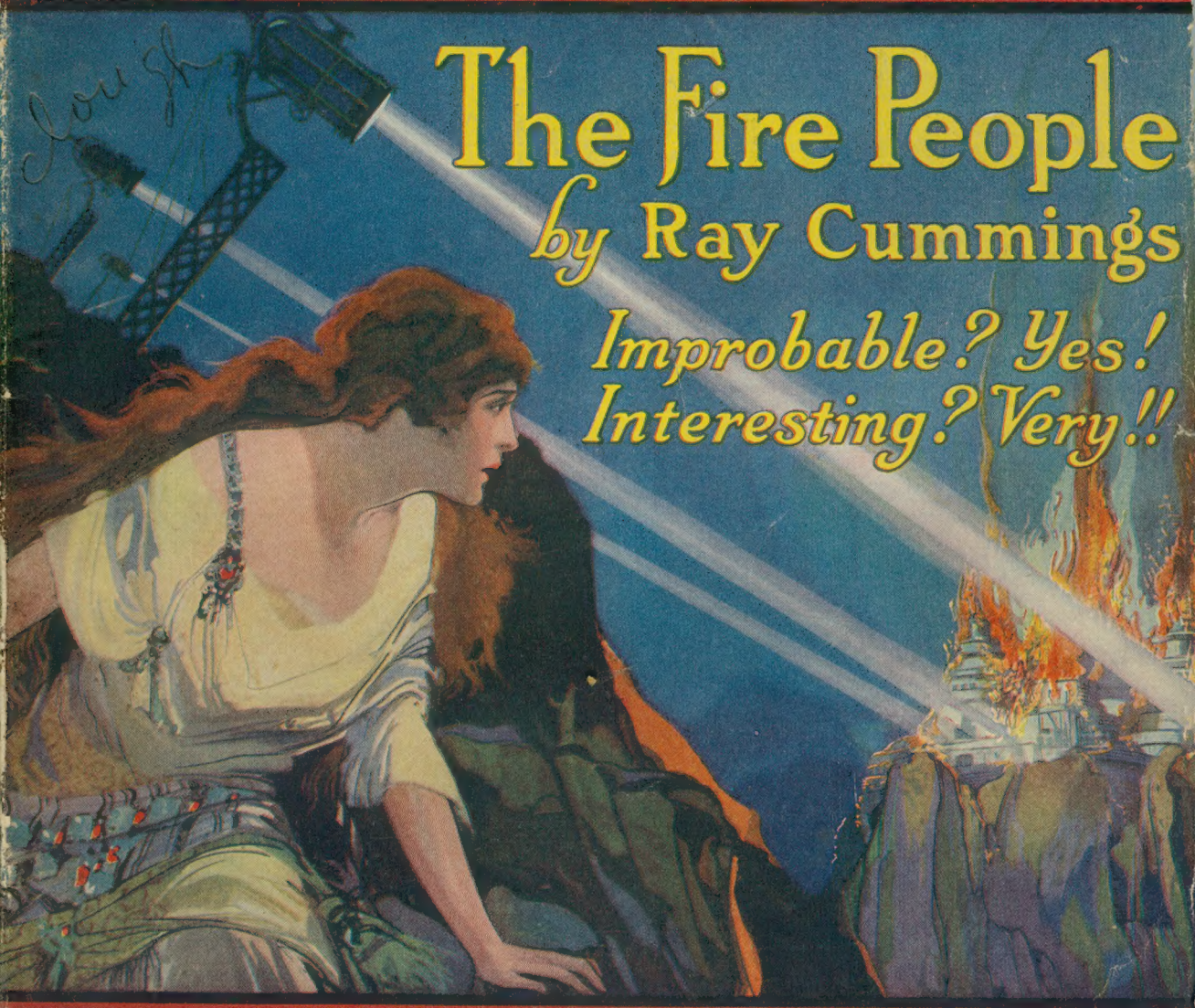
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



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by Ray Cummings

Improbable? Yes!
Interesting? Very!!

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

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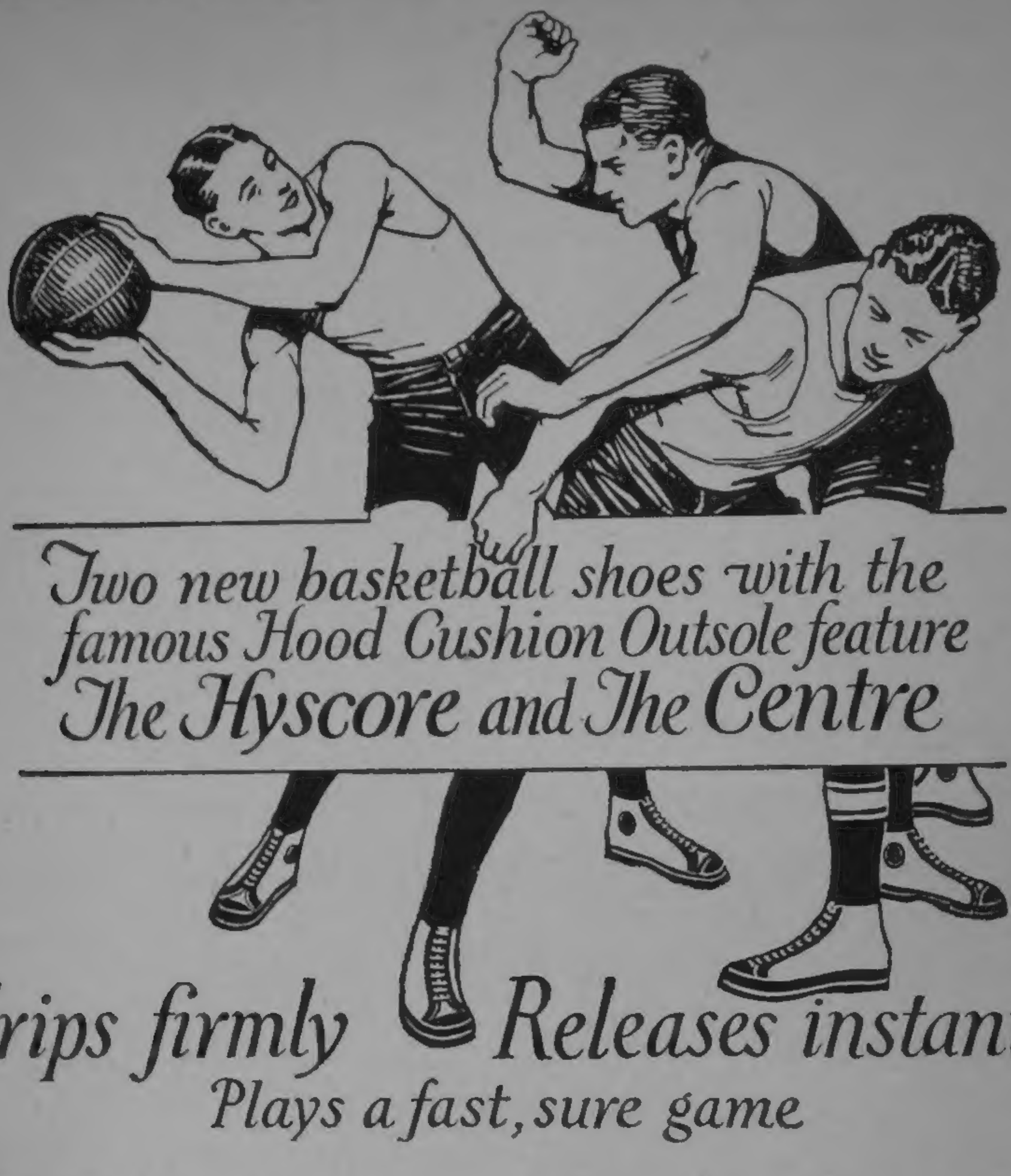

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The Hyscore and The Centre

Grips firmly Releases instantly

Plays a fast, sure game

Modern Basketball has needed just these shoes. It is a game where speed and accuracy in footwear count large. Some shoes, designed to grip firmly, release with just enough tardiness to slow down a fast game. Other shoes which release quickly do not provide quite the confidence in the grip. The specially constructed Hood outsole will grip firmly and release instantly—the two requirements for super-footwork in basketball. The Hyscore is built and reinforced to stand up under a long hard schedule. The Centre is lighter in construction, which to many is a point in its favor, and will stand up under the ordinary schedule. The Centre is also a splendid all-round gym shoe.

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HOOD

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DERMATOLOGICAL LABORATORIES
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*Address*_____

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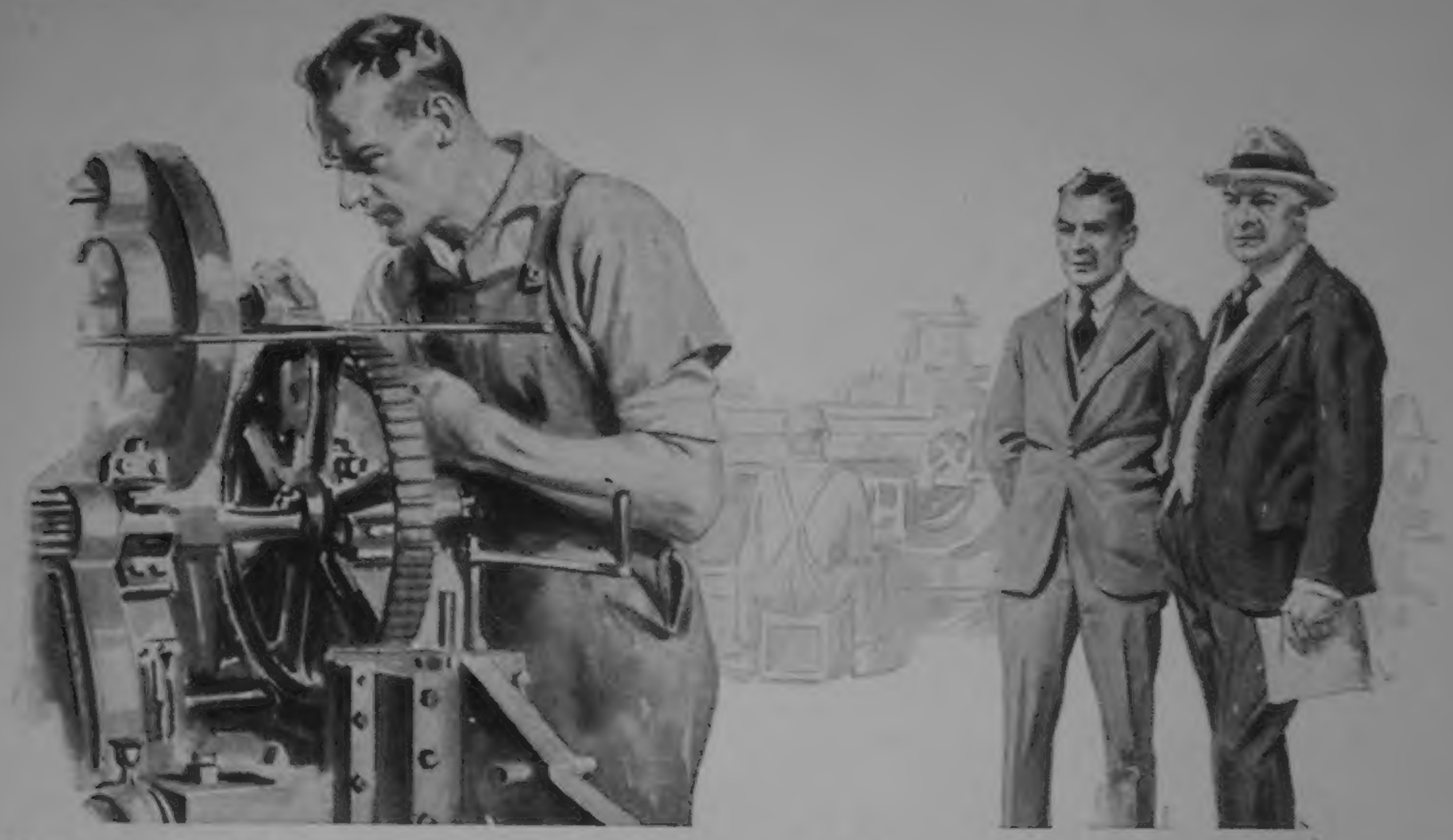

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLVI SATURDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1922 NUMBER 4

The Fire People

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "The Golden Atom," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE COMING OF THE LIGHT.

THE first of the new meteors landed on the earth in November, 1940. It was discovered by a farmer in his field near Brookline, Massachusetts, shortly after daybreak on the morning of the 11th. Astronomically, the event was recorded by the observatory at Harvard as the sudden appearance of what apparently was a new star, increasing in the short space of a few hours from invisibility to a power beyond that of the first magnitude, and then as rapidly fading again to invisibility. This star was recorded by two of the other great North American observatories, and by one in the Argentine Republic. That it was comparatively small in mass and exceedingly close to the earth, even when first discovered, was obvious. All observers agreed that it was a heavenly body of an entirely new order.

The observatory at Harvard supplement-

ed its account by recording the falling, just before dawn of the 11th, of an extraordinarily brilliant meteor that flamed with a curious red and green light as it entered the earth's atmosphere. This meteor did not burn itself out, but fell, still retaining its luminosity, from a point near the zenith, to the horizon.

What the farmer saw was a huge fire burning near the center of his field. It was circular in form and about thirty feet in diameter. He was astonished to see it there, but what surprised him more was its peculiar aspect.

It was still the twilight of dawn when he reached the field. He beheld the fire first from a point several hundred yards away. As he explained it, the light—for it was more aptly described as a light than a fire—extended in parallel rays from the ground directly upward into the sky. He could see no line of demarkation where it ended at the top. It seemed to extend into the sky an infinite distance. It was, in fact, as though an enormous searchlight were buried in his field, casting its beam of light directly upward.

But more than all this, the farmer was struck by the extraordinary color of the light. At the base it was a deep, solid green. This green color extended upward for perhaps fifty feet, then it shaded into red. The farmer noticed, too, that the fire did not leap and dance with flames, but seemed rather to glow—a steady light like the burning of colored powder. In the morning half-light it threw a weird, unearthly reddish-green glow over the field.

The farmer approached to within twenty feet of the light. He looked to see what was burning, but could not determine, for the greenish base extended directly down into the ground. He noticed also that it gave out extraordinarily little heat. The morning was not exceptionally cold, yet he stood within twenty feet of the fire without discomfort.

I was on the staff of the Boston *Observer* at this time. I reached Brookline about noon of the 11th of November, and went directly to the field where the fire was burning. Nearly a thousand people were there, watching.

By daylight the fire still held its green and red color, although its light was much less intense. It held its characteristic shape. Though clearly definable, under the rays of the sun it became quite transparent. Looking through it, I could see plainly the crowd of people on the farther side of the field. The effect was similar to looking through a faintly tinted glass, except that now I noticed that the light had a sort of crawling motion, like the particles of a heavy fog. The fire came from a hole in the ground; by daylight now the hole could be seen plainly.

For some moments I stood silent, awestruck by this extraordinary spectacle. Then a man standing beside me remarked that there was no smoke. I had not thought of that before, but it was true—indeed, the fire appeared phosphorescent.

"Let's get up closer," said the man beside me.

Together we walked to within ten feet of the outer edge of the fire. We could feel its heat now, although it was not uncomfortable except when it beat directly on our faces. Standing so close, we could see down into the hole from which the light emanated.

Lying at the bottom of the hole, perhaps ten feet below the surface, I saw the jagged top of an enormous gray sphere, burned and pitted. This was the meteor—nearly thirty feet in diameter—that in its fall had buried itself deep in the loam of the field.

As we stood there looking down into the hole some one across from us tossed in a ball of paper. It seemed to hang poised a moment, then it shriveled up, turned black, and floated slowly down until it rested on top of the sphere.

Some one else threw a block of wood about a foot long into the hole. I could see it as it struck the top of the sphere. It lay there an instant; then it, too, turned black and charred, but it did not burst into flame.

The man beside me plucked at my sleeve. "Why don't it burn?" he asked.

I shook myself loose.

"How should I know?" I answered impatiently.

I found myself trembling all over with an unreasoning fear, for there was something uncanny about the whole affair. I went back to Brookline soon after that to send in the story and do some telephoning. When I got back to the field I saw a man in front of me carrying a pail of water. I fell into step beside him.

"What do you suppose it 'll do?" he asked as we walked along.

"God knows," I answered. "Try it."

But when we got down into the field we found the police authorities in charge. The crowd was held back now in a circle, a hundred yards away from the light. After some argument we got past the officials, and, followed by two camera men and a motion-picture man who bobbed up from nowhere, walked out across the cleared space toward the light. We stopped about six or eight feet from the edge of the hole; the heat was uncomfortably intense.

"I'll make a dash for it," said the man with the pail.

He ran forward a few steps, splashed the water into the light, and hastily retreated. As the water struck the edge of the light there came a roar like steam escaping under tremendous pressure; a great cloud of vapor rolled back over us and dissolved. When the air cleared I saw that the light, or the fire of this mysterious agency, was unchanged. The water dashed against it had had absolutely no effect.

It was just after this incident that the first real tragedy happened. One of the many quadruplanes that had been circling over the field during the afternoon passed directly over the light at an altitude of perhaps three thousand feet. We saw it sail away erratically, as though its pilot no longer had it under control. Then it suddenly burst into flame and came quivering down in a long, lengthening spiral of smoke.

That night the second of the meteors landed on the earth. It fell near Juneau, Alaska, and was accompanied by the same phenomena as the one we were watching. The reports showed it to be slightly smaller in size than the Brookline meteor. It burned brightly during the day of November 12. On the morning of the 13th wireless reports from Alaska stated that it had burned out during the previous night.

Meanwhile the light at Brookline was under constant surveillance. It remained unchanged in all respects.

The next night it rained—a heavy, pelting downpour. For a mile or more around the field the hissing of steam could be heard as the rain struck the light. The next morning was clear, and still we saw no change in the light.

Then, a week later, came the cold spell of 1940. Surpassing in severity the winters of 1888 and 1918, it broke all existing records of the Weather Bureau. The temperature during the night of November 20, at Brookline, fell to thirty degrees below zero. During this night the fire was seen to dwindle gradually in size, and by morning it was entirely extinguished.

No other meteors fell that winter; and, as their significance remained unexplained, public interest in them soon died out. The observatories at Harvard, Flagstaff, Cordoba, and the newer one on Table Mountain, near Cape Town, all reported the appearance of several new stars, flaring into prominence for a few hours and visible just after sunset and before dawn, on several nights during November. But these published statements were casually received and aroused only slight general comment.

Then, in February, 1941, came the publication of Professor Newland's famous theory of the Mercutian Light—as the fire was afterward known. Professor Newland was at this time the foremost astronomer in America, and his extraordinary theory and the predictions he made, coming from so authoritative a source, amazed and startled the world.

His paper, couched in the language of science, was rewritten to the public understanding and published in the newspapers of nearly every country. It was an exhaustive scientific deduction, explaining in theory the origin of the two meteors that had fallen to earth two months before.

In effect Professor Newland declared that the curious astronomical phenomena of the previous November—the new "stars" observed, the two meteors that had fallen with their red and green light-fire—were all evi-

dence of the existence of intelligent life on the planet Mercury.

I give you here only the more important parts of the paper as it was rewritten for the public prints:

> . . . I am therefore strongly inclined to accept the theory advanced by Schiaparelli in 1882, in which he concluded that Mercury rotates on its axis once in eighty-eight days. Now, since the sidereal revolution of Mercury, *i. e.*, its complete revolution around the sun, occupies only slightly under eighty-eight days, the planet always presents the same face to the sun. On that side reigns perpetual day; on the other—the side presented to the earth as Mercury passes us—perpetual night.
>
> The existence of an atmospheric envelope on Mercury, to temper the extremes of heat and cold that would otherwise exist on its light and dark hemispheres, seems fairly certain. If there were no atmosphere on the planet, temperatures on that face toward the sun would be extraordinarily high—many hundred degrees hotter than the boiling point of water.
>
> Quite the other extreme would be the conditions on the dark side, for without the sheltering blanket of an atmosphere, this surface must be exposed to the intense cold of interplanetary space.
>
> I have reason to believe, however, particularly from my deductions made in connection with the photographs taken during the transit of Mercury over the face of the sun on November 11 last, that there does exist an atmosphere on this planet—an atmosphere that appears to be denser and more cloudy than our own. I am led to this conclusion by other evidence that has long been fairly generally accepted as fact. The terminating edge of the phases of Mercury is not sharp, but diffuse and shaded—there is here an atmospheric penumbra. The spectroscope also shows lines of absorption, which proves that Mercury has a gaseous envelope thicker than ours.
>
> This atmosphere, whatever may be its nature I do not assume, tempers the heat and cold on Mercury to a degree comparable to the earth. But I do believe that it makes the planet—on its dark face particularly—capable of supporting intelligent life of some form.
>
> Mercury was in transit over the face of the sun on November 11, of last year, within a few hours of the time the first meteor fell to earth. The planet was therefore at one of her closest points to the earth, and—this is significant—was presenting her *dark face* toward us.
>
> At this time several new "stars" were reported, flashing into brilliancy and then fading again into obscurity. All were observed in the vicinity of Mercury; none appeared elsewhere. I believe these so-called "stars" to be some form of interplanetary vehicle—probably navigated in space by beings from Mercury. And from them were launched the two meteors that struck our planet. How many others were dispatched that may have missed their mark we have no means of determining.
>
> The days around November 11 last, owing to the proximity of Mercury to the earth, were most favorable for such a bombardment. A similar time is now once more almost upon us!
>
> Because of the difference in the velocities of Mercury and the earth in their revolutions around the sun, one synodic revolution of Mercury, *i. e.*, from one inferior conjunction to the next, requires nearly one hundred and sixteen days. In eighty-eight days Mercury has completed her sidereal revolution, but during that time the earth has moved ahead a distance requiring twenty-eight days more before she can be overtaken.
>
> After the first week in March of this year therefore Mercury will again be approaching inferior conjunction, and again will pass at her closest point to the earth.
>
> We may expect at this time another bombardment of a severity that may cause tremendous destruction, or destroy entirely life on this planet!

CHAPTER II.

THE UNKNOWN ENEMY.

WHEN, in February, 1941, Professor James Newland issued this remarkable statement, my paper sent me at once to interview him. He was at this time at the head of the Harvard observatory staff. He lived with his son and daughter in Cambridge. His wife was dead. I had been acquainted with the professor and his family for some time. I first met his son, Alan, during our university days at Harvard. We liked each other at once, and became firm friends—possibly because we were such opposite physical types, as sometimes happens.

Alan was tall, lean and muscular—an inch or so over six feet—with the perfect build of an athlete. I am dark; Alan was blond, with short, curly hair, and blue eyes. His features were strong and regular. He was, in fact, one of the handsomest men I have ever seen. And yet he acted as though he didn't know it—or if he did, as though he considered it a handicap. I think what

saved him was his ingenious, ready smile, and his retiring, unassuming—almost diffident—manner.

At the time of the events I am describing Alan was twenty-two—about two years younger than I. It was his first year out of college. He had taken a scientific course and intended to join his father's staff.

Beth and Alan were twins. I was tremendously interested in Beth even then. She seemed one of the most worth-while girls I had ever met. She was a little wisp of femininity, slender and delicate, hardly more than five feet one or two. She had beautiful golden hair and an animated, pretty face, with a pert little snub nose. She was a graduate of Vassar, and planned to take up chemistry as a profession, for she had the same scientific bent as her father and brother.

I called upon Professor Newland the evening of the day his statement was published, and found all three discussing it.

"You want me to talk for publication, don't you, Bob Trevor?" the professor asked suddenly, after we had exchanged a few pleasantries.

He was a wiry little man, about sixty, smooth-shaven, with sparse gray hair, a rugged face of strong character, and a restless air of energy about him. He was an indefatigable worker; indeed, I am confident that, for any single continuous period of work without sleep, he could have run Alan and me into the ground and still have been comparatively fresh.

"You want an exclusive follow-up story from me to-night, don't you?" he repeated.

I admitted that I did.

"What you'll get won't be just what you expect. Look at this."

He pulled one of the evening papers toward him vigorously. "They think it is humorous. There—read that."

The item to which he pointed was a sprightly account of the weird beings that might shortly arrive from Mercury.

"They think it's a joke—some of them. There's another—read that."

The attitude of the press was distinctly an inclination to treat the affair from the humorous side. I had seen indications of that during the day at the office.

"Look here, Bob"—the professor swept all the papers aside with his hand. "You put it to them this way. Make them see this is not a prediction of the end of the world. We've had those before—nobody pays any attention to them, and rightly so. But this Mercutian Light is more than a theory—it's a fact. We fought it last November, and we'll have to fight it again next month. That's what I want to make them realize."

"They'll think it is worth being serious about," Alan put in, "if one of those lights drop into Boston or New York—especially if it happens to play in a horizontal direction instead of vertical."

We went into the whole subject thoroughly, and the professor gave me a second signed statement in which he called upon the nations of the world to prepare for the coming peril.

The actual characteristics of the Mercutian Light we had discussed before several times. A good deal had been printed about it during the previous December—without, as I have said, attracting much public attention. The two meteors had been examined. They were found to be of a mineral that could have originated on Mercury. They were burned and pitted like other meteorites by their passage through the earth's atmosphere.

Of the light itself Professor Newland had already given his opinion. It was, he said, some unknown form of etheric vibration. It radiated heat very slightly, but it had the peculiarity of generating intense heat in anything it touched directly.

"You'd better explain that, father," said Beth, when we reached this point in our summary that evening.

"Heat is the vibration of molecules of matter," the professor began.

I nodded.

"Make it clear when you write it up, Bob," Alan put in. "It's like this. All molecules are in motion—the faster the motion, the hotter the substance, and vice versa."

"And this Mercutian Light," Beth added, "has the power of enormously increasing the molecular vibration of anything it comes in contact with—"

"But it doesn't radiate much heat itself," Alan finished.

Professor Newland smiled. "The old man doesn't have much of a show, does he?"

Alan sat down somewhat abashed, but Beth remained standing beside her father, listening intently to everything he said.

"This light I conceive to be the chief weapon of warfare of the Mercutians," the professor went on. "There has been some talk of those two meteors being signals. That's all nonsense. They were not signals—they were missiles. It was an act of aggression."

I tried to get him to give some idea of what the inhabitants of Mercury might be like, for that was what my editor chiefly desired.

At first he would say nothing along those lines.

"That is pure speculation," he explained. "And very easy speculation, too. Any one can allow his imagination to run wild and picture strange beings of another world. I don't predict they will actually land on the earth—and I have no idea what they will look like if they do land. As a matter of fact, they will probably look very much like ourselves. I see no reason to doubt it."

"Like us?" I ejaculated.

"Why not?" said Alan. "Conditions on Mercury are not fundamentally different from here. We don't have to conceive any very extraordinary sort of being to fill them."

"Here's what you can tell your paper," said the professor abruptly. "Take it down."

I took out my notebook, and he dictated briskly.

"Regarding the possible characteristics of inhabitants of Mercury, it is my conception that intelligent life—let us say, human life—wherever it exists in our universe does not greatly differ in character from that of our own planet. Mars, Venus, Mercury, even Neptune, are relatively close. I believe the Creator has constructed all human life on the same general plan.

"I believe that, being neighbors—if I may be permitted the expression—it is intended that intercourse between the planets should take place. That we have been isolated up to the present time is only because of our ignorance—our inability to bridge the gap. I believe that migration, friendship, commerce, even war, between the inhabitants of different planets of our solar system was intended by Almighty God—and, in good time, will come to pass.

"This is not science; and yet science does not contradict it, in my opinion. Human life on Mercury, Venus or Mars may need bodies taller, shorter, heavier, lighter, more fragile or more solid than ours. The organs will differ from ours, perhaps, but not materially so. The senses will be the same.

"In a word, I believe that nearly all the range of diversity of human life existing on any of the planets exists now on this earth, or has existed in the past, or will exist in the future through our own development, or at most the differences would not be greater than a descent into our animal kingdom would give us.

"Mercutians may have the sense of smell developed to the point of a dog; the instinct of direction of the homing pigeon; the eyes of a cat in the dark, or an owl in the light; but I cannot conceive of them being so different that similar illustrations would not apply.

"I believe the Creator intends intercourse of some kind, friendly or unfriendly, to take place between the worlds. As China was for centuries, so for eons we of this earth have been isolated. That time is past. The first act was one of aggression. Let us wait for the next calmly but soberly, with full realization of the danger. For we may be—indeed, I think we are—approaching the time of greatest peril that human life on this earth has ever had to face!"

CHAPTER III.

THE LANDING OF THE INVADERS.

MARCH 8, 1941, was the date at which Mercury was again to be in inferior conjunction—at her closest point to the earth since her transit over the face of the sun on November 11 of the previous

year. During February—after Professor Newland's statements—the subject received a tremendous amount of publicity. Some scientific men rallied to Professor Newland's support; others scouted the idea as absurd.

Officially, the governments of the world ignored the matter entirely. In general, the press, editorially, wrote in a humorous vein, conjuring up many ridiculous possibilities of what was about to happen. The public followed this lead. It was amused, interested to a degree; but, as a mass, neither apprehensive nor serious—only curious.

In some parts of the earth—among the smaller Latin nations particularly—some apprehension was felt. But even so, no one knew what to do about it—where to go to avoid the danger—for the attack, if it came at all, was as likely to strike one country as another.

The first week in March arrived with public interest steadily increasing. Mercury, always difficult of observation, presented no spectacle for the public gaze and imagination to feed upon. But, all over the world, there were probably more eyes turned toward the setting and rising sun during that week than ever had been turned there before.

Professor Newland issued no more statements after that evening I have described. He was taken with a severe cold in the latter part of February, and as Beth was in delicate health and did not stand the Northern winters well, the whole family left for a few months' stay at their bungalow home in Florida. They were quite close to the little village of Bay Head, on the Gulf coast. I kept in communication with them there.

The 8th of March came and passed without a report from any part of the earth of the falling of the Mercutian meteors. Satirical comment in the press doubled. There was, indeed, no scientific report of any unusual astronomical phenomena, except from the Harvard observatory the following morning. There Professor Newland's assistant, Professor Brighton, stated he had again observed a new "star"—an interplanetary vehicle, as Professor Newland described it. Only a single one had been observed this time. It was seen just before dawn of the 9th.

Then, about 4 P.M., Atlantic time, on the afternoon of the 9th, the world was electrified by the report of the landing of invaders in the United States. The news came by wireless from Billings, Montana. An interplanetary vehicle of huge size had landed on the desert in the Shoshone River district of northern Wyoming, west of the Big Horn Mountains.

This strange visitor—it was described as a gleaming, silvery object perhaps a hundred feet in diameter—had landed near the little Mormon settlement of Byron. The hope that its mission might be friendly was dispelled even in the first report from Billings. The characteristic red and green light-fire had swept the country near by—a horizontal beam this time—and the town of Byron was reported destroyed, and in all likelihood with the loss of its entire population.

The Boston *Observer* sent me to Billings almost immediately by quadruplane. I arrived there about eight o'clock on the evening of the 10th. The city was in a turmoil. Ranchers from the neighboring cattle country thronged its streets. A perfect exodus of people—Mormons and oil men from Shoshone country, almost the entire populations of Cody, Powell, Garland, and other towns near the threatened section, the Indians from the Crow Reservation at Frannie—all were streaming through Billings.

The Wyoming State Airplane Patrol, gathered in a squadron by orders from Cheyenne, occasionally passed overhead, flashing huge white searchlights. I went immediately to the office of the Billings *Dispatch*. It was so crowded I could not get in. From what I could pick up among the excited, frightened people of Billings, and the various bulletins that the *Dispatch* had sent out during the day, the developments of the first twenty-four hours of Mercutian invasion were these:

Only a single "vehicle"—we called it that for want of a better name—had landed. Airplane observation placed its exact position on the west bank of the Shoshone

River, about four miles southwest of Byron and the same distance southeast of Garland. The country here is typically that of the Wyoming desert—sand and sagebrush—slightly rolling in some places, with occasional hills and buttes.

The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad runs down its spur from the Northern Pacific near Billings, passes through the towns of Frannie—near the border of Montana and Wyoming—and Garland, and terminates at Cody. This line, running special trains throughout the day, had brought up a large number of people. During the afternoon a bomb of some kind—it was vaguely described as a variation of the red and green light-rays—had destroyed one of the trains near Garland. The road was now open only down to Frannie.

The town of Byron, I learned, was completely annihilated. It had been swept by the Mercutian Light and destroyed by fire. Garland was as yet unharmed. There was broken country between it and the Mercutian invaders, and the rays of the single light which they were using could not reach it directly.

Such, briefly, was the situation as I found it that evening of the 10th. In Billings we were sixty-five miles north of the Mercutian landing place. What power for attack and destruction the enemy had, we had no means of determining. How many of them there were; how they could travel over the country; what the effective radius of their light-fire was; the nature of the "bomb" that had destroyed the train on the C., B. and Q. near the town of Garland—all those were questions that no one could answer.

Billings was, during those next few days, principally a gathering place and point of departure for refugees. Yet, so curiously is the human mind constituted, underneath all this turmoil the affairs of Billings went on as before. The stores did not close; the Billings *Dispatch* sent out its reports; the Northern Pacific trains from east and west daily brought their quota of reporters, picture men and curiosity seekers, and took away all who had sense enough to go. The C., B. and Q. continued running trains to Frannie—which was about fifteen miles from the Mercutian landing place—and many of the newspaper men, most of those, in fact, who did not have airplanes, went there.

That first evening in Billings, Rolland Mercer—a chap about my own age, who had brought me from the East in one of the Boston *Observer's* planes—and I, decided on a short flight about the neighboring country to look the situation over. We started about midnight, a crisp, cloudless night with no moon. We had been warned against venturing into the danger zone; several of the Wyoming patrol and numbers of private planes had been seen to fall in flames when the light struck them.

We had no idea what the danger zone was—how close we dared go—but decided to chance it. To fly sufficiently high for safety directly over the Mercutians appeared difficult, since the light-fire already had proven effective at a distance of several miles at least. We decided not to attempt that, but merely to follow the course of the C., B. and Q. southwest to Cody, then to circle around to the east, and thence back north to Billings, passing well to the east of the Mercutians.

We started, as I have said, about midnight, rising from the rolling prairie back of Billings. We climbed five hundred feet and, with our searchlight playing upon the ground beneath, started directly for Frannie. We passed over Frannie at about eight hundred feet, and continued on the C., B. and Q. line toward Garland. We had decided to pass to a considerable extent to the west of Garland, to be farther away from the danger, and then to strike down to Cody.

We were flying now at a speed close to a hundred and forty miles an hour. Off to the left I could see the red and green beam of the single light of the Mercutians; it was pointing vertically up into the air, motionless. Something—I do not know what—made me decide to turn off our searchlight.

I looked behind us. Some miles away, and considerably nearer the Mercutians than we were, I saw the light of another plane. I was watching it when suddenly

the red and green beam swung toward it, and a moment later picked it up. I caught a fleeting glimpse of what I took to be a little biplane. It remained for an instant illuminated by the weird red and green flare; then the Mercutian Light swung back to its vertical position. A second later the biplane burst into flames and fell.

The thing left me shuddering. I turned our searchlight permanently off and sat staring down at the shadowy country scurrying away beneath us.

Mercer had evidently not seen this tragedy. He did not look at me, but kept facing the front. We were now somewhat to the west of Garland, with it between us and the Mercutians. The few lights of the town could be seen plainly. The country beneath us seemed fairly level. To the west, half a mile away, perhaps, I could make out a sheer, perpendicular wall of rock. We seemed to be flying parallel with it and about level with its top.

We were rising a little, I think, when suddenly our engines stopped. I remember it flashed through my mind to wonder how Mercer would dare shut them off when we were flying so low. The sudden silence confused me a little. I started to ask him if he had seen the biplane fall, when he swung back abruptly and gripped me by the arm.

"Turn on the light—you fool—we've got to land!"

I fumbled with the searchlight. Then, just as I turned the switch, I saw, rising from a point near the base of the Mercutian Light, what appeared to be a skyrocket.

It rose in a long, graceful arc, reached the top of its ascent, and came down, still flaming. I remember deciding it would fall in or near Garland.

It seemed to go out just before it landed—at least I did not follow it all the way down. Then there came a flash as though a huge quantity of red and green smokeless powder had gone off in a puff; a brief instant of darkness, and then flames rose from a hundred points in the little town. The next second our wheels ground in the sand.

I heard a splintering crash; something struck me violently on the shoulder; then—blackness.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MEETING.

PROFESSOR NEWLAND and his family were living in seclusion in their Florida home at the time the Mercutian invaders landed in Wyoming. The curious events in Florida, which connected them so directly with the invasion and caused Alan later to play so vital a part in it, are so important that I am impelled to relate them chronologically, rather than as they were told me afterward by Alan and Beth.

When, on March 9, the news that the Mercutians had landed in Wyoming reached Professor Newland, he immediately established telegraphic communication with Harvard. Thus he was kept fully informed on the situation—indeed, he saw it as a whole far better than I did.

On March 12, three days after the landing, orders from Washington were given out, regulating all passenger transportation in the direction of the danger zone. One hundred miles was the limit set. State troops were placed on all trains, State roads were likewise guarded, and the State airplane patrols united in a vigilant effort to keep outside planes from getting it. On the 13th the President of the United States issued an appeal to all persons living within the hundred-mile limit, asking them to leave.

On March 14 the Canadian government offered its assistance in any way possible—its Saskatchewan airplane patrol was already helping Montana maintain the hundred-mile limit. Similar offers were immediately made by nearly every government in the world.

Such were the first main steps taken to safeguard the people.

By March 14 the actual conditions of affairs in the threatened section of Wyoming was fairly well known. The town of Garland was destroyed by fire on the night of the 10th, and the towns of Mantua and

Powell—north and south of Garland respectively—the following morning. On the evening of the 11th a government plane, flying without lights, sacrificed itself in an attempt to drop a bomb into the Mercutian camp. It was caught by the light when almost directly over the Mercutians, and was seen to fall in flames.

It was estimated that the single light was controlling an area with a radius of about ten miles. To the south and west there was practically nothing but desert. To the west Garland, Mantua and Powell were burned. To the north Deaver and Crowley —on another branch of the C., B. and Q., about ten miles from the Mercutians—were as yet unharmed. They were, however, entirely deserted by the 15th.

During these days the Mercutians did not move from their first landing place. Newspaper speculation regarding their capabilities for offensive action ran rife. Perhaps they could not move. They appeared to possess but one ray of light-fire; this had an effective radius of ten miles. The only other offensive weapon shown was the rocket, or bomb, that had destroyed the C., B. and Q. train near Garland and the town itself. Reports differed as to what had set fire to the town of Powell.

All these points were less than ten miles away from the Mercutian base. Obviously, then, the danger was grossly exaggerated. The unknown invaders could safely and easily be shelled by artillery from a much greater distance. Mercury had passed inferior conjunction; no other Mercutian vehicles had been reported as landing anywhere on the earth. A few days, and the danger would be over. Thus the newspapers of the country settled the affair.

On March 14th it was announced that General Price would conduct the military operations against the Mercutians. Press dispatches simultaneously announced that troops, machine guns and artillery were being rushed to Billings. This provoked a caustic comment from the Preparedness League of America, to the effect that no military operations of any offensive value could be conducted by the United States against anybody or anything.

This statement was to some extent true. During the twenty years that had elapsed since the World War armament of all kinds had fallen into disuse. Few improvements in offensive weapons had been made. The military organization and equipment of the United States, and, indeed, that of many of the other great powers, was admittedly inadequate to cope with any very powerful enemy.

Professor Newland telegraphed to the War Department at Washington on the 14th, stating that in his opinion new scientific measures would have to be devised to deal with this enemy, and that whatever scientific knowledge he had on the subject was at their disposal at their request. To this telegram the government never replied.

It was a day or two after that—on the morning of the 16th, to be exact—that the next most important development in this strange affair took place. Alan Newland rose that morning at dawn and took his launch for a trip up one of the neighboring bayous. He was alone, and intended to fish for an hour or so and return home in time for breakfast.

He went, perhaps, three miles up the winding little stream. Then, just after sunrise, he shut off the motor and drifted silently along. The bayou split into two streams here, coming together again a quarter of a mile farther on, and thus forming a little island. It was just past the point of this island that Alan shut off his motor.

He had been sitting quiet several minutes preparing his tackle, when his eye caught something moving behind the dark green of the magnolia trees hanging over the low banks of the island. It seemed to be a flicker of red and white some five feet above the ground. Instinctively he reached for the little rifle he had brought with him to shoot at it, thinking it might be a bird, although he had never seen one before of such a color.

A moment later, in the silence, he heard a rustling of the palmettos near the bank of the bayou. He waited, quiet, with the rifle across his knees. His launch was still moving forward slowly from the impetus of the motor. And then, quite suddenly, he

came into sight of the figure of a girl standing motionless beside a tree on the island a few feet back from the water and evidently watching him.

Alan was startled. He knew there was no one living on the island. There were, in fact, few people at all in the vicinity—only an occasional negro shack or the similar shack of the "poor white trash," and a turpentine camp, several miles back in the pines.

But it was not the presence of the girl here on the island at daybreak that surprised him most, but the appearance of the girl herself. He sat staring at her dumbly, wondering if he were awake or dreaming. For the girl—who otherwise might have appeared nothing more than an extraordinarily beautiful young female of this earth, somewhat fantastically dressed—the girl had wings!

He rubbed his eyes and looked again. There was no doubt about it—they were huge, deep-red feathered wings, reaching from her shoulder blades nearly to the ground. She took a step away from the tree and flapped them once or twice idly. Alan could see they would measure nearly ten feet from tip to tip when outstretched. His launch had lost its forward motion now, and for the moment was lying motionless in the sluggish bayou. Hardly fifty feet separated him from the girl.

Her eyes stared into his for a time—a quiet, curious stare, with no hint of fear in it. Then she smiled. Her lips moved, but the soft words that reached him across the water were in a language he could not understand. But he comprehended her gesture; it distinctly bade him come ashore. Alan took a new grip on himself, gathered his scattered wits, and tried to think connectedly.

He laid his rifle in the bottom of the launch; then, just as he was reaching for an oar, he saw back among the tall cabbage palms on the island in an open space, a glowing, silvery object, like a house painted silver and shining under the rays of a brilliant sun.

Then the whole thing came to him. He remembered the press descriptions from Wyoming of the Mercutian vehicle. He saw this white rectangle on the little Florida island as a miniature of that which had brought the invaders of Wyoming from space. And then this girl—

Fear for an instant supplanted amazement in Alan Newland's heart. He looked around. He could see back into the trees plainly, almost across the island. He stood up in the boat. There seemed no one else in sight.

Alan sat down and, taking up the oar, sculled the launch toward the spot where the girl was standing. His mind still refused to think clearly. The vague thought came to him that he might be struck dead by some unknown power the instant he landed. Then, as he again met the girl's eyes—a clear, direct, honest gaze with something of a compelling dignity in it—his fear suddenly left him.

A moment later the bow of the launch pushed its way through the wire grass and touched the bank. Alan laid aside his oar, tied the boat to a half-submerged log, and stepped ashore.

CHAPTER V.

CAPTURED!

WHEN I recovered consciousness I found myself lying in the sand with Mercer sitting beside me. It was still night. The tangled wreckage of our airplane lay near by; evidently Mercer had carried me out of it.

I sat up.

"I'm all right," I said. "What happened?"

He grinned at me with relief.

"The damned engine stopped. I don't know what was the matter. You had the light off. I couldn't see anything when we got down close."

He waved his hand toward the wrecked plane.

"It's done for," he added; "but I'm not hurt much. Are you?"

"No," I said. "I'm all right."

I climbed to my feet unsteadily; my head seemed about to split open.

"Garland's burning," he added.

Over the desert, some two or three miles

away, the burning town could be seen plainly.

"What are we going to do?" Mercer asked after a moment.

I was pretty weak and badly bruised all over. Mercer seemed to have fared better than I. We talked over our situation at length. Finally we decided to rest where we were until daybreak. I would feel better then, and we could start back on foot for Mantua and Frannie.

I lay down again—my head was going round like a top—and Mercer sat beside me. It was pretty cold, but we were warmly dressed and not uncomfortable. The fact that we were so close to the Mercutians—not much over seven or eight miles—worried us a little. But we reasoned that we were in no great danger. We could still see their light-ray standing vertically in the air.

Occasionally it would swing slowly to one side or the other. Once it swung toward us, but as its base was in a hollow, it was cut off by the higher ground between as it swung down, and we knew it could not reach us from that position.

After a while I fell asleep. When Mercer woke me up it was dawn.

"Let's get started," he said. "I'm hungry as the devil."

I felt much better now. I was hungry myself, and stiff, and chilled.

"You'll feel better walking," he added. "Come on. It 'll take us a deuce of a while over this sand."

We decided to strike for the railroad at its closest point to us. The State automobile road to Cody ran along near the railroad, and we planned to follow that up to Mantua.

After a last look at our plane, which was hopelessly demolished, we started off, heading north of Garland. We had been walking along a few minutes when Mercer suddenly gripped me by the arm. I followed the direction of his glance. Another rocket was rising from the Mercutian base. It was still dark enough for us to see its flare as it rose and curved in a long, graceful arc. We stopped stock still and stood watching. The rocket arched over to the north. As it came down we lost sight of it.

"That went into Mantua," said Mercer in a horrified whisper.

A moment later we saw, in the direction of Mantua, that brief, silent, smokeless red and green flash. Then the sky lighted up a lurid red, and we knew Mantua was burning.

We stood looking at each other for a time, too frightened and horrified for words. The thing was not like modern warfare. It was uncanny in its silent deadliness, and there seemed a surety about it that was appalling.

"We're cut off," said Mercer finally.

His face was white and his voice trembled.

We were both pretty much unnerved, but after a moment we got ourselves together and talked calmly about what was best for us to do.

We concluded finally to go ahead to the road. We calculated we were not over two miles from the nearest part of it. We would strike it about halfway between Garland and Mantua, and we thought it just possible we would find passing along it some refugees from the two towns. I couldn't quite see how meeting them could help us any, unless we encountered some vehicle that would give us a lift. However, the walking would be easier, and when we got to the road we could decide which way to go—north to Frannie, or south around Garland to Powell.

The sun was just rising when we started again. It took us nearly an hour to reach the road. As far as we could see it was deserted. We stopped here and held another consultation.

"It's easily twelve miles up to Frannie," I said, "and I don't believe more than eight to Powell. Let's go that way. We can get down to Cody from there. I guess there are still people left in Powell."

We started down the road toward Garland. It seemed the sensible thing to do. We were both famished by now and thirsty also. I had an idea that, since the fires in Garland were about burned out, there might be an isolated house unharmed, where we could find food and water.

I sometimes wonder now at our temerity in venturing so calmly to face this unknown

danger. We were in the enemy's country —an enemy whose methods of attacking us might at any moment prove a hundred times more efficacious than they had so far. But we did not consider that then.

There was, indeed, nothing else we could have done advantageously. This road we were on was the only one within twenty or thirty miles. To have struck west from our wrecked plane—away from the Mercutians—would have brought us to face a hundred miles or more of desert over to the Yellowstone.

It was now broad daylight—and almost cloudless, as is usual in this locality. Half an hour of walking brought us nearly to the outskirts of Garland. There was less smoke all the time. We judged the fire must be pretty well burned out by now. Behind us the smoke of Mantua, a much larger town than Garland, rose in a great rolling cloud.

We were walking along, wondering what we should find ahead, when suddenly behind Garland and off to the right we saw another huge cloud of smoke rising.

"Powell!" ejaculated Mercer, coming to a dead stop in the road. "Good God, they've got Powell, too!"

There was no doubt about it—the town of Powell was also in flames. We sat down together then at the side of the road. We didn't quite know what else to do. We were both faint. Our situation seemed every moment to be getting worse; we appeared further from even comparative safety now than when we left our plane at dawn.

There seemed nothing else to do now but go ahead into Garland, a distance of only half a mile. There we might find food and water; and, thus refreshed, we could start back north to cover the fifteen miles to Frannie.

Garland, a few days before, was a town of about five hundred inhabitants; but I do not suppose that, at the time of its destruction, there were more than a score or two of people remaining in it.

We started off again, and within twenty minutes were among the smoldering houses of the town. It consisted practically of only one street—the road we were on—with the houses strung along it. The houses had been, most of them, small frame structures. They were nothing now but smoldering heaps of ashes with the chimneys left standing, like gaunt, silent sentinels. As we passed on down the road we saw several twisted forms that we took for the remains of human beings. It is unnecessary for me to describe them. We hurried on, shuddering.

Our objective was the lower end of the town, for there, perhaps a quarter of a mile off to one side with a branch road leading to it, we saw a single house and outbuildings left standing. We turned down this road and approached the house. It was a rather good-looking building of the bungalow type with a wide-spreading porch. Beside it stood a long, low, rectangular building we took to be a garage. There was an automobile standing in the doorway, and behind it we caught the white gleam of an airplane wing.

"We're all right now," cried Mercer. "There's a car, and there's a plane inside. One of them ought to run."

At this unexpected good fortune we were jubilant. We could get back to Billings now in short order.

We climbed up the porch steps and entered the house. We did not call out, for it seemed obvious that no one would be there after what had occurred in Garland so near by.

"There must be something to eat here," I said. "Let's find out—and then get back to Billings."

The big living room was empty, but there was no sign of disorder. A closed door stood near at hand.

"That might be the way to the kitchen," I suggested. "Come on."

I pushed open the door and entered, with Mercer close behind me. It was a bedroom. The bed stood over by a window. I stopped in horror, for on the bed, hunched forward in a sitting position, was the body of a man!

With the first sudden shock of surprise over, we stopped to note details. The man's hand, lying on the blanket, clutched a revolver. A mirror directly across from him was shattered as though by a bullet. A

small bedroom chair was overturned near the center of the room.

"He—he isn't burned." Mercer spoke the words hardly above a whisper. "Something else killed him—there's been a fight. They—"

He stopped.

A sudden panic seized me. I wanted to run—to do something—anything—that would get me away from the nameless, silent terror that seemed all about.

"Come on," I whispered back. "God! Let's get out of here."

As we got out into the living room we heard slow, dragging footsteps on the porch outside. We stopped again, shrinking back against the wall.

"They—they—it's—" Mercer's whispered words died away. We were both terrified beyond the power of reasoning. The dragging footsteps came closer—a sound that had in it nothing of human tread. Then we heard soft voices—words that were unintelligible.

"It's the Mercutians," I found voice to whisper. "They—"

A figure appeared in the porch doorway, outlined against the light behind—the figure of a short, squat man. He seemed to have on some sort of white, furry garment. He was bareheaded, with hair falling to his shoulders.

At the sight of him my terror suddenly left me. Here was an enemy I could cope with. The dread fear of supernatural beings that had possessed me evaporated.

With a shout to Mercer I dashed forward directly at the doorway. I think the Mercutian had not yet seen us; he stood quite still, his body blocking the full width of the doorway.

I let fly with my fist as I came up and hit him full in the face. At the same instant my body struck his. He toppled backward and I went through the doorway. I tripped over him on the porch outside and fell sprawling. Before I could rise three other Mercutians fell upon me and pinned me down.

Mercer was right behind me in the doorway. I saw him pause an instant to see what was happening. There seemed to be five Mercutians altogether. The one I had hit lay quite still. Three others were holding me.

The fifth stood to one side, watching Mercer, but apparently inactive.

I saw Mercer hesitate. An expression of surprise came over his face. His body swayed; he took a single step forward, half turned, and then fell in a crumpled heap.

CHAPTER VI.

MIELA.

THE girl stood quiet beside the tree, watching Alan as he tied up his boat. She continued smiling. Alan stood up and faced her. He wondered what he should say—whether she could understand him any better than he could her.

"You speak English?" he began hesitantly.

The girl did not answer at once; she seemed to be trying to divine his meaning. Then she waved her hand—a curious movement, which he took to be a gesture of negation—her broadening smile disclosing teeth that were small, even, and very white.

At this closer view Alan could see she was apparently about twenty years old, as time is reckoned on earth. Her body was very slender, gracefully rounded, yet with an appearance of extreme fragility. Her slenderness, and the long, sleek wings behind, made her appear taller than she really was; actually she was about the height of a normal woman of our own race.

Her legs were covered by a pair of trousers of some silky fabric, grayish blue in color. Her bare feet were incased in sandals, the golden cords of which crossed her insteps and wound about her ankles, fastening down the lower hems of the trousers. A silken, gray-blue scarf was wound about her waist; crossing in front, it passed up over her breast and shoulders, crossing again between the wings behind and descending to the waist.

Her hair was a smooth, glossy black. It was parted in the middle, covered her ears, and came forward over each shoulder. The plaits were bound tightly around with silken cords; each was fastened to her body

in two places, at the waist and, where the plait ended, the outside of the trouser leg just above the knee.

Her skin was cream colored, smooth in texture, and with a delicate flush of red beneath the surface. Her eyes were black, her face small and oval, with a delicately pointed chin. There was nothing remarkable about her features except that they were extraordinarily beautiful. But—and this point Alan noticed at once—there was in her expression, in the delicacy of her face, a spiritual look that he had never seen in a woman before. It made him trust her; and—even then, I think—love her, too.

Such was the strange girl as Alan saw her that morning standing beside the tree on the bank of the little Florida bayou.

"I can't talk your language," said Alan. He realized it was a silly thing to say. But his smile answered hers, and he went forward until he was standing close beside her. She did not appear so tall now, for he towered over her, the strength and bigness of his frame making hers seem all the frailer by contrast.

He held out his hand. The girl looked at it, puzzled.

"Won't you shake hands?" he said; and then he realized that, too, was a silly remark.

She wrinkled up her forehead in thought; then, with a sudden comprehension, she laughed—a soft little ripple of laughter—and placed her hand awkwardly in his.

As he released her hand she reached hers forward and brushed it lightly against his cheek. Alan understood that was her form of greeting. Then she spread her wings and curtsied low—making as charming a picture, he thought, as he had ever seen in his life.

As she straightened up her eyes laughed into his, and again she spoke a few soft words — wholly unintelligible. Then she pointed toward the sun, which was still low over the horizon, and then to the silver object lying back near the center of the island.

"I know," said Alan. "Mercury."

The girl repeated his last word immediately, enunciating it almost perfectly. Then she laid her hand upon her breast, saying:

"Miela."

"Alan," he answered, indicating himself.

The girl laughed delightedly, repeating the word several times. Then she took him by the hand and made him understand that she wished to lead him back into the island.

They started off, and then Alan noticed a curious thing. She walked as though weighted to the ground by some invisible load. She did not raise her feet normally, but dragged them, like a diver who walks on land in his heavily weighted iron shoes. After a few steps she spread her wings, and, flapping them slowly, was able to get along better, although it was obvious that she could not lift her body off the ground to fly.

For a moment Alan was puzzled, then he understood. The force of gravity on earth was too great for the power of her muscles, which were developed only to meet the pull of Mercury—a very much smaller planet.

The girl was so exceedingly frail Alan judged she did not weigh, here on earth, much over a hundred pounds. But even that he could see was too much for her. She could not fly, and it was only by the aid of her wings that she was able to walk with anything like his own freedom of movement.

He made her understand, somehow, that he comprehended her plight. Then, after a time, he put his left arm about her waist. She spread the great red wings out behind him, the right one passing over his shoulder; and in this fashion they went forward more easily.

The girl kept constantly talking and gesturing. She seemed remarkably intelligent; and even then, at the very beginning of their acquaintanceship, she made Alan understand that she intended to learn his language. Indeed, she seemed concerned about little else; and she went about her task systematically and with an ability that amazed him.

As they walked forward she kept continually stooping to touch objects on the ground—a stick, a handful of sand, a

woodland flower, or a palmetto leaf. Or, again, she would indicate articles of his clothing, or his features. In each case Alan gave her the English word; and in each case she repeated it after him.

Once she stopped stock still, and with astonishing rapidity and accuracy rattled off the whole list—some fifteen or twenty words altogether—pointing out each object as she enunciated the word.

Alan understood then—and he found out afterward it was the case—that the girl's memory was extraordinarily retentive, far more retentive than is the case with any normal earth person. He discovered also, a little later, that her intuitive sense was highly developed. She seemed, in many instances, to divine his meaning, quite apart from his words or the gestures—which often were unintelligible to her—with which he accompanied them.

After a time they reached the Mercutian vehicle. It was a cubical box, with a pyramid-shaped top, some thirty feet square at the base, and evidently constructed of metal, a gleaming white nearer like silver than anything else Alan could think of. He saw that it had a door on the side facing him, and several little slitlike windows, covered by a thick, transparent substance which might have been glass.

As they got up close to it Alan expected the girl's companions to come out. His heart beat faster. Suddenly he raised his voice and shouted:

"Hello, inside!"

The girl looked startled. Then she smiled and made the negative gesture with her hand.

Alan understood then that she was alone. They went inside the vehicle. It was dark in there. Alan could make out little, but after a moment his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness.

He noticed first that the thing was very solidly constructed. He expected to see some complicated mechanism, but there was little or nothing of the kind so far as he could make out in the darkness in this first hurried inspection.

Fastened to one wall was an apparatus which he judged was for the making of oxygen. He looked around for batteries, and for electric lights, but could see nothing of the kind.

All this time Alan's mind had been busily trying to puzzle out the mystery of the girl's presence here alone. Evidently she came in the most friendly spirit; and thus, quite evidently, her mission, whatever it was, must be very different from that of the invaders who had landed almost simultaneously in Wyoming.

Whatever it was that had brought her—whatever her purpose—he realized it must be important. The girl, even now, seemed making no effort to show or explain anything to him, but continued plying him with questions that gave her the English words of everything about them that she could readily indicate.

Alan knew then that she must have something important to communicate—something that she wanted to say as quickly as possible. And he knew that she realized the only way was for her to learn his language, which she was doing with the least possible loss of time, and with an utter disregard of everything else that might have obtruded.

Alan decided then to take the girl back home with him—indeed, it had never been in his mind to do anything else—and let Beth care for her. Meanwhile he would do everything he could to help her get the knowledge necessary to make known what it was that had brought her from Mercury. That she had some direct connection with the Wyoming invaders he did not doubt.

Alan had just reached this decision when the girl made him realize that she had the same thought in mind. She pointed around the room and then to herself, and he knew that she was insisting upon a general word to include all her surroundings.

Finally Alan answered: "House."

After pointing to him, she waved her hand vaguely toward the country outside the open doorway, and he understood she was asking where his house was.

Alan's decision was given promptly. "We'll go there," he said.

He put his arm about her and started out. By the way she immediately responded he knew she understood, and that it was what she wished to do.

They got back to Alan's launch in a few moments. He seated her in the stern of the boat, where she half reclined with her wings spread out a little behind her. So assiduous was she—and so facile—in her task of learning English, that before she would let him start the motor she had learned the names of many of the new objects in sight, and several verbs connected with his actions of the moment.

There was a large tarpaulin in the launch, and this Alan wrapped about the girl's shoulders. He did not want her vivid red wings to be seen by any one as they passed down the bayou.

Finally they started off.

Professor Newland's home was some three miles from the village of Bay Head, on the shore of a large bay which opened into the Gulf of Mexico. The bayou down which they were heading flowed into this bay near where the house stood. Their home was quite isolated, Alan thought with satisfaction. There was no other habitation nearer than Bay Head except a few negro shacks. With the girl's wings covered he could take her home and keep her there, in absolute conclusion, without causing any comment that might complicate things.

On the way down the bayou the girl showed extreme interest in everything about her. She seemed to have no fear, trusting Alan implicitly in his guidance and protection of her in this strange world. She continued her questions; she laughed frequently, with almost a childlike freedom from care. Only once or twice, he noticed, as some thought occurred to her, the laughter died away, her face suddenly sobered, and a far-away, misty look came into her beautiful eyes.

Alan sat close beside her in the stern, steering the launch and occasionally pulling the tarpaulin back onto her shoulders when it threatened to slip off because of her impetuous gestures.

They saw only a few negroes as they passed down the bayou, and these paid no particular attention to them. Within an hour Alan had the girl safely inside the bungalow, and was introducing her, with excited explanations, to his astonished father and sister, who were just at that moment sitting down to breakfast.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MERCUTIAN CAMP.

AS I saw Mercer fall to the floor of the porch a sudden rage swept over me. I struggled violently with the three men pinning me down. They appeared very much weaker than I, but even though I could break their holds the three of them were more than a match for me.

The man who was standing inactive, and who I realized had struck down Mercer in some unknown, deadly way, appeared to be the leader. Once, as one of my assailants made some move, the import of which the leader evidently understood, but which I did not, I heard him give a sharp command. It occurred to me then that if I offered too much resistance—if it seemed I was likely to get away from them—I might possibly be struck as swiftly as Mercer had been. So I gave up abruptly and lay still.

They must have understood my motive—or perhaps they felt that I was not worth the trouble of taking alive—for immediately I stopped struggling they unhanded me and rose to their feet.

I stood up also, deciding to appear quite docile, for the time being at any rate, until I could comprehend better with what I had to contend.

The man who appeared to be their leader issued another command. One of the men with whom I had been struggling immediately stepped a few feet away, out of my reach. I knew he had been told to guard me. He kept just that distance away thereafter, following my movements closely and seeming never to take his eyes off me for a moment.

I had opportunity now to inspect these strange enemies more closely. The leader was the tallest. He was about five and a half feet in height, I judged, and fairly stocky. The others were all considerably shorter—not much over five feet, perhaps. All were broad-framed, although not stout to any degree approaching fatness.

From their appearance, they might all have been fairly powerful men, the leader especially. But even the short struggle I had had with them showed me they were not. Their bodies, too, had seemed under my grip to have a flimsy quality, a lack of firmness, of solidity, entirely belied by their appearance.

They were all dressed in a single rude garment of short white fur, made all in one piece, trousers and shirt, and leaving only their arms bare. Their feet were incased in buskins that seemed to be made of leather. Their hair was a reddish-brown color, and fell scraggling a little below the shoulder line.

Their skin was a curious, dead white—like the pallor of a man long in prison. Their faces, which had no sign of hair on them, were broad, with broad flat noses, and with abnormally large eyes that seemed to blink stolidly with an owl-like stare.

Their leader was of somewhat different type. He was, as I have said, nearly six inches taller than the others, and leaner and more powerful looking. His hair was black, and his skin was not so dead white. His eyes were not so abnormally large as those of his companions. His nose was straight, with a high bridge. His face was hairless. It was a strong face, with an expression of dignity about it, a consciousness of power, and a certain sense of cruelty expressed in the firmness of his lips and the set of his chin.

None of them was armed—or, at least, their weapons were not visible to me.

I was much concerned about Mercer. He and the man I had hit were both lying motionless where they had fallen. I stooped over Mercer. No one offered to stop me, although when I moved I saw my guard make a swift movement with his hand to his belt. My heart leaped to my throat, but nothing happened to me, and I made a hasty examination of Mercer.

Quite evidently he was dead.

Meanwhile the Mercutians were examining their fallen comrade. He also was dead, I judged from their actions. They left him where he was lying, and their leader impatiently signed me toward the steps that led down from the porch to the roadway. We started off, my guard keeping close behind me. I noticed then how curiously hampered the Mercutians seemed to be in their movements.

I have explained how Alan observed the effect of our earth's gravity on Miela. It was even more marked with the Mercutians here, for she had the assistance of wings, while they did not. The realization of this encouraged me tremendously. I knew now that physically these enemies were no match for me; that I could break away from them whenever I wished.

But the way in which Mercer had been killed—that I could not understand. It was that I had to guard against. I was afraid to do anything that would expose me to this unknown attack.

I tried to guess over how great a distance this weapon, whatever it was, would prove effective. I assumed only a limited number of feet, although my only reason for thinking so was my guard's evident determination to keep close to me.

All this flashed through my mind while we were descending the steps to the roadway. When we reached the ground we turned back toward the garage, and with slow, plodding steps the leader of the Mercutians preceded me to its entrance, his companions following close behind me. They had evidently been here before, I could tell from their actions. I realized that probably they had all been inside the garage when Mercer and I first approached the house.

It was quite apparent now that the Mercutians did not understand the use of either automobiles or airplanes; they poked around these as though they were some strange, silent animals. Inside the garage I was ordered to stand quiet, with my guard near by, while the rest of them continued what appeared to be a search about the building.

We passed by the house, and I realized that we were starting for the Mercutian base some four miles away. I remembered then that I was extremely hungry and thirsty. I stopped suddenly and endeavored to explain my wants, indicating the house as a place where I could get food.

The leader smiled. His name was Tao,

I had learned from hearing his men address him. I do not know why that smile reassured me, but it did. It seemed somehow to make these enemies less inhuman—less supernatural—in my mind. Indeed, I was fast losing my first fear of them, although I still had a great respect for the way in which they had killed Mercer.

Tao told his men to wait, and motioned me toward the house. The bodies of Mercer and the man I had struck down were still lying where they had fallen on the porch. We found food and water in the kitchen, and I sat down and made a meal, while Tao stood watching me. When I had finished I put several slices of bread and meat in my coat. He signified that it was unnecessary, but I insisted, and he smiled again and let me have my way.

Again we started off. This walk of four miles of desert that lay between Garland and the point on the Shoshone River where the invaders were established was about all I could manage, for I was almost exhausted. I realized then how great an exertion the Mercutians were put to, for they seemed nearly as tired as I. We stopped frequently to rest, and it was well after noon when we approached the hollow through which the Shoshone River ran.

Several times I noticed where the Mercutian Light had burned off the scrubby desert vegetation. As we got closer I could see it now in the sunlight, standing vertically up in the air, motionless. There were signs all about now where the light had burned. We were passing along a little gully—the country here was somewhat rough and broken up—when something came abruptly from behind a rock. Its extraordinary appearance startled me so I stared at it in amazement and fear. It came closer, and I saw it was one of the Mercutians.

He was completely incased in a suit of dull black cloth, or rubber, or something of the kind. On his head was a helmet of the same material, with a mask over his face having two huge circular openings covered with a flexible, transparent substance. On his back was a sort of tank with a pipe leading to his mouth. He looked, indeed, something like a man in a diving suit, and still more like the pictures I had seen of soldiers in the World War with gas masks on. He pulled off his helmet as he came up to us, and I saw he was similar in appearance to the red-haired Mercutians who had captured me.

After a short conversation with Tao he went back to his station by the rock, and we proceeded onward down the gully to the river bank. I saw a number of Mercutians dressed this way during the afternoon. They seemed to be guarding the approaches to the camp, and I decided later this costume was for protection against the effects of the light-ray.

The Shoshone River was at this point about two hundred feet wide, and at this season of the year a swift-moving, icy stream some two or three feet deep. There were small trees at intervals along its banks. All about me now I could see where they had been burned by the action of the light.

The vehicle in which the invaders had arrived lay on the near side of the river, some five hundred feet below where we came out of the gully. It was similar in appearance to the one Alan had found in Florida, only many times larger. It lay there now, with its pyramid-shaped top pointing up into the air, close beside the river, and gleaming a dazzling white under the rays of the afternoon sun.

There were perhaps a hundred Mercutians in sight altogether. Most of them were down by the vehicle; all of them were on this side of the river. In fact, as I soon realized, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for them to have crossed. The desert on the opposite side of the Shoshone was level and unbroken. It was swept clear of everything, apparently, by the light-ray.

We turned down the river bank, and soon were close to the shining vehicle that had brought these strange invaders from space. What would I see in this camp of the first beings to reach earth from another planet? What fate awaited me there? These questions hammered at my brain as we approached the point where so much death and destruction had been dealt out to the surrounding country.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Down the Coast of Barbary

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of The John Solomon Stories, "Comrade Island," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

"Say quick," quoth he, "I bid thee say
What manner of man art thou?"

IN the grounds of a villa outside Algiers, in the year 1730, two men were sitting on a low stone garden seat beneath an orange tree.

"A horse's head?" said Patrick Spence, and frowned. "With no inscription?"

"It needs none."

Dr. Shaw peered at the bronze coin in his hand, brushing the fresh earth from it lovingly.

As his spade and the dirt on his strong brown forearms testified, Spence had been at work in the garden when the coin turned up. He drew at his pipe with the quiet satisfaction of one who has labored hard. He had the piercing, far-seeing eyes of a sailor.

Dr. Shaw had walked from the city. He wore a camel-hair burnoose, which kept the intense sunlight from his lean, spare frame; he was a tall man, erect and muscular. One sensed something sweet and kindly in his smile as he regarded the coin.

"This horse's head is inscription enough, Patrick," he mused. "It shows the coin to be of Punic times. I have not a few of them. You will recall the lines:

"Locus in urbe fuit media, laetissimus umbra,
Quo primum jactati undis—"

The younger man broke in upon the sonorously rolling lines with a laugh.

"No, no, doctor! The little Latin I ever knew was forgot in the vortex of navi-

gation. You Oxford men always seem ready to spout Greek and Latinity—but we haven't time for much of that in America. And you'd better take off that burnoose or you'll sweat to death before you know it."

Absent-mindedly, Dr. Shaw loosened his garment. His eyes lifted to the sea.

"A sweet spot, Patrick!"

The American nodded. Well outside the tottering walls of Algiers, along the pleasant northern hill-slopes, the white blaze of sunlight was here broken by gardens and villas bordering a winding road. The scent of orange-flowers clustered thickly, the flashing red of pomegranates glimmered among the greenery; here were groves and fountains, flowers and running brooks, in sharp contrast to the squalid heat and crowded city streets.

"Something like this had Virgilius in mind," observed Shaw, "when he spoke of the old Corycian gardener and his wondrous fruit! By the way"—he glanced at his burnoose—"this garment is most interesting, Patrick!

"It must have been shaped after the cloak of the little god Telesphorus, straight about the neck, with a Hippocrates's sleeve for cowl. It answers, I take it, to the pallium, or the cucullus of the Gauls, mentioned by Martial, or to the cloaks wherein the Israelites folded up their kneading troughs, as do the Moors to this day—"

The younger man leaped to his feet.

"Hello!" he cried sharply. "Shaw, something's happened! Here's one of the consulate negroes on the run!"

A man became visible, running along the road. He was a black man. His nearly naked skin glistened with sweat. Panting, he turned in at the gate and came to them with a hasty salutation. He addressed Shaw in a chatter of Arabic.

"Bless my soul!"

The good doctor turned. He acted as interpreter, chaplain, and general factotum to the English consulate.

"They want me at once—I know not what has happened! Patrick, remain here, if you will. I am most anxious to have those specimen roots from Egypt laid under the soil before the sun withers them, if it be not imposing on your—"

"It's the least I can do," said Patrick Spence. "I'll be glad to keep busy. Don't forget the tobacco you promised to bring me! Be sure to get Virginia leaf from that shop next the consulate. All the others sell only Turkish, and I like not the stuff."

The Rev. Thomas Shaw, D.D., F. R. S., fellow of Queen's College, Oxford, strode away hastily with the negro. He turned to wave his hand, then vanished from sight.

Patrick Spence knocked out his pipe and leisurely refilled it. He strolled down to the open gates, where the bale of Egyptian roots had been left by a muleteer, and smiled to himself at thought of his friend.

"A rare man enough," he mused. "Except when the classics fasten on his tongue, he has no more of the parson about him than I have. Lord knows that's little enough, at present!"

He stood between the open gates and looked out at the sea, in sight over the winding road. A wistful hunger grew in his eyes at sight of a speck of white far out.

"I'd like to be aboard her and heading for Boston town. But here I am, penniless and dependent upon a consul's charity—hello! We have strangers among us, it seems!"

Coming toward him along the road were two riders, and the gray eyes of Spence dwelt curiously upon them. He knew that these must be new arrivals in Algiers. Attracted first by their remarkable costumes, it was their faces which finally drew the keen interest of the American.

The man was robed in a burnoose of snowy white. Against this, about his neck, hung a most amazing thing—the glorious collar of the Golden Fleece, a jewel worn by kings alone! The woman beside him wore a silken dress of apricot hue; a huge sun-hat shaded her head.

The man's face was, or had been, extremely handsome. Once it had been full and rotund. Now it was thin and gaunt, lined with folds of empty skin, half hidden by a mustache and goatee of grayish black. Suffering lay in that face, and strange inward pain.

The black eyes that blazed like jewels held weird fires in their depths; they fas-

cinated Spence, repelled him. No common man, this, who wore that collar of the Fleece! A prince at the least!

The woman — well, once she, too, had been handsome. Her face was tired, her eyes weary. In her gaze, Spence read things that moved him to pity; yet he knew that he liked her.

Following this pair, well in the rear, appeared a company of horsemen, in the gay robes of Moroccan Moors. Spence did not care to be spat upon as a Christian, and was about to withdraw when he saw the lady rein in her horse, smiling at him.

He saluted, sailor fashion, and the horseman inclined his head; slight as was that gesture, it was filled with a high courtesy.

"Good morning, sir," said the man, in English. "You certainly have a superb view here."

"Few compare with it," was the quiet reply of Spence. "Only one can surpass it—the view of one's own home shores."

The lady turned her face away, as though the words had burned her. The man looked at Spence from those remarkable eyes that flamed like living gems.

"Ah!" he said. "You are an Englishman?"

"I am from Boston, in America," and Spence smiled. "Since I was born there, I take some pride in calling myself an American."

The other plucked at his goatee, a thin smile in his jaded features.

"I congratulate you, sir, who have found for yourself a new country. It argues well for your capabilities. I have made the effort more than once without success; yet men are accustomed to speak well of my mental quality."

"That could not remain in doubt," said Spence, "after a moment of converse with you."

At this compliment the lady smiled, leaned over in her saddle, and spoke under her breath. The horseman smiled again; yet in his eyes lay an indefinable torment.

"I do not easily forget so kindly a speech from so courteous a gentleman," he said. "If you ever come into Morocco, *señor* American, pray consider me your friend and debtor."

He inclined his head again and passed on. After them spurred the Moors.

Two or three, officers of the Algerian garrison, flung Spence a word of greeting. So, then, that strange couple had come from Morocco! A Spaniard, doubtless; he had said "*señor*."

Spence remained at the gate, smoking, musing, forgetting the bale of herbs. In a whole month no English ship had come to set him on his way home again. His own stout Boston ship had been crippled by Tunisian corsairs, smashed by hurricanes, sunk.

His ship and all he owned were gone—the savings of ten years swept away. His men were gone. Alone, he had been picked up by an English frigate and landed here at Algiers. At thirty he was facing life anew, empty handed. It galled him sorely to depend on charity.

Thanks to Shaw and good Edward Holden, the consul, Patrick Spence found Algiers friendly, for Englishmen were highly favored here. Yet how to get on home again?

As he stood thus musing, he was aware of a man walking toward him. He recognized a Moor who occupied the adjoining villa, which belonged to the Dey of Algiers. Who he was, Spence had not the least idea. He was tall, athletic, of severely ascetic features, thinly bearded; his eyes were deep and somber.

As he came, his gaze was fastened on Spence. In one hand he carried a box of leather, a foot long, six inches wide and deep, fastened with strips of brass.

"I seek you," he said abruptly. "You are *El Capitan* Spence?"

From the man's face, voice, bearing, Spence instantly knew that this was no common man.

"I am, *señor*," he answered in Spanish. "May I offer you hospitality—"

"There is no time." The Moor flung a quick glance around, then his eyes fastened upon Spence again. "Know you who I am?"

"No, *señor*."

"I am Mulai Ali the Idrisi—like yourself, a fugitive. Know you a man named Ripperda?"

Spence shook his head. A sardonic smile touched the bearded lips of the Moor.

"Then you are better off than I. Now, I know your story, and I bring you a message from the astrologer of Arzew."

"A message—for me?" Spence did not hide his astonishment.

"Aye. I know what manner of man you are; from the stars, I know that your fate is twined with mine. You are to be trusted. Do you believe in the stars?"

"When they guide my ship, yes," said Spence. "As arbiters of destiny—decidedly no."

"But I do," said the other. "*Señor*, the stars have linked us together. Do you wish to make money—large sums?"

Spence eyed him shrewdly.

"Not enough to deny my religion."

The Moor broke into a laugh.

"Ah, I have no love for renegades. Now listen. I need a friend at once—one whom I can trust; if this box remains in my hands an hour longer it spells my death.

"When I was last at Oran, the astrologer of Arzew told me about you. Your fate lies with mine. You are the one man I can trust. If you will give me your help and friendship, I offer you three things: of money, as much as you desire; of power, more than you dream; and for a wife, the most wonderful woman in the world."

Patrick Spence thought he was dreaming. Yet he would have been a poor seaman had he not been able to think swiftly. This blunt speech, this haste, showed a crisis. He seized it.

"I do not sell my friendship," he answered, "either for money or power. As for a wife, I desire none."

The Moor stared at him.

"You refuse my offer?"

"Yes. If my help will avail you, I give it freely—but I will not sell it."

"By Allah, you are a man!" The dark eyes flashed suddenly. "Will you go to Morocco with me? Think well! The stars have promised me success. Perhaps your friend, Dr. Shaw, will go also. Yet death may lie ahead. Will you go?"

Spence shrugged.

"Yes, I will go."

"Good! Take this box and guard it. And here is the message from the astrologer: Beware of a man who wears a black burnoose. *Adios!*"

Mulai Ali hastily thrust into Spence's hands the box and a folded paper. Then he turned abruptly and strode away at a rapid pace, unusual in a Moor. Spence stared after his figure in bewildered amazement, then knocked out his pipe and pocketed it.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed whimsically. "A man wearing the Golden Fleece offers me hospitality in Morocco. Then comes this chap, who seems to know all about me, and offers me a job! And who's this astrologer person?"

He opened the paper and started. English characters met his eye.

> To Captain Spence of Boston:
>
> Mulai Ali has told me of you, as have others. You may trust him absolutely. I have persuaded him that you can help him—because I need your help. I am a slave.
>
> If he makes promises, he can fulfill them. Tell the consul at Algiers that I have woven a net to catch Ripperda. If you be the true man I think you, then come with Mulai Ali and help me.
>
> This note was unsigned.

"Ripperda! Who is the fellow?" mused Patrick Spence, frowning. "And I am to beware of a man who wears a black burnoose—plague take it all! Am I mad or dreaming?"

He filled his pipe again. He had been long enough in Algiers to know that the place was a hotbed of intrigue. Spanish armies were holding Oran against the Moors and the land was in turmoil. It was not so strange that he, a Christian, should have been picked on as trustworthy.

Yet, oddly enough, he found his thoughts dwelling not so much upon this astrologer, who was a slave, nor upon the Moor, who was a fugitive, as upon that man who wore the Golden Fleece. He was surely some great man—yet he craved a kind word, a compliment, as a hungry dog craves a bone! Who was he?

The sun went westering. Later came Thomas Shaw to the villa again, and with him, to spend the night, the consul, Edward Holden.

And they brought an explanation to Patrick Spence—an amazing explanation.

CHAPTER II.

"Hardy he was, and wys to undertake;
With many a tempest hadde his berd ben shake."

THE three men, after hearing Spence's story, sat drinking coffee and discussing it.

"Arzew," said the divine, "is the ancient Arsenaria, twenty miles east of Oran. Since the Spanish siege, the Moorish provincial government is located at Arzew, under a proper Turkish rascal named Hassan Bey. Of this astrologer I never heard. Eh, Ned?"

Holden shook his head.

"Zounds! I wish I knew what net is spread for that cursed Ripperda!"

"But who is my man of the Golden Fleece?" demanded Patrick Spence.

"We come to that," said Dr. Shaw. "Most men are mad upon some point; you upon ships; I upon old ruins; Mulai Ali, like many Moors, upon the stars. This Mulai Ali is of the Idrisi blood, Morocco's royal line. His cousin is the sherif. He has been in hiding here—"

"But my man of the Golden Fleece—"

"Ah! That man, Patrick, is more than a little mad. He landed this morning, and departs to-night. Because of his coming I was so hastily summoned—all the consulates are in turmoil! Unless he goes the way of all flesh soon, that man will set the world by the ears—"

"But who is he?" cried Spence testily.

"The politest man in Europe. Born a Roman Catholic baron of Holland, he became a Protestant in order to go to Madrid as ambassador. At Madrid he again shifted religions, and his allegiance likewise. He became a Spaniard. He destroyed Alberoni, became a duke, a minister, then absolute ruler of Spain! It was he, the most astute politician since Richelieu, who handled the Vienna treaty. But regard the maggot of madness in his brain, Patrick!

"In a moment of reverse, this man lost his head. He deserted his family, fled with a Castilian girl, and finally came to Morocco a fugitive. Again he changed his faith. He was made a pasha, then prime minister of Morocco—and now rules that country as he ruled Spain. His errand here is to form a coalition of the Barbary States against Christendom; his name is William Lewis de Ripperda."

Spence started. "Ripperda! What connection has he with Mulai Ali, then?"

Both men shook their heads.

"We know not, Captain Spence," said the consul. "We do know that, unless we destroy Ripperda, this Ripperda will destroy Spain and Christendom! His ability—"

There was a knock at the door. A slave entered, gave Holden a low message.

Holden, looking astonished, nodded. Into the room came a cloaked and hooded figure. The man stood silent until the door had closed, then uncovered his face; he was Mulai Ali.

"*Señores!* I must speak swiftly." He lifted a warning hand. "You know Ripperda is here?"

The consul nodded in puzzled silence. The Moor spoke with harsh, driving energy.

"Captain Spence has told you of the box I gave him? A month ago Ripperda sent me that box. In it were things he obtained through his agents in Spain—documents relating to the old Moorish kings of Seville and Granada, certain of their relics, and copies of treaties which Spain has made with other nations.

"Knowing that I was of the Idrisi blood, Ripperda proposed to set me on the throne of Morocco, by aid of these relics and my own power, and then to publish the Spanish treaties. Their publication would make Spain isolated, hated by her neighbors, distrusted. Ripperda hopes to unite the Barbary States and Egypt, means to conquer Spain again for the Moors—"

"This is madness!" exclaimed the consul.

"The madness of a great man and a great traitor. Now, finding himself more secure in Morocco than he had thought, the dog has betrayed me. I must flee or be slain. Ripperda commands the Moslem armies before Oran; the Dey dare not offend him. Do you wish to destroy this man Ripperda?"

The consul frowned, but Dr. Shaw disregarded the frown and spoke curtly.

"Yes."

"Then go to Morocco with me, by way of Tlemcen and the caravan route."

Mulai Ali spoke rapidly, excitedly.

"The Dey will provide an escort. I must go to Arzew in disguise, and shall meet you there. Hassan Bey, who commands at Arzew, is my friend.

"You are Christians; I can trust you. Once at Udjde, over the Moroccan frontier, I am safe. The Governor of Udjde is my kinsman and supports me. All Morocco will rise for me; the Sherif Abdallah is much hated. Speak quickly! Will you go or not?"

"I will go, for one," spoke up Spence eagerly. "Why do you wish our company?"

"Because you are true men. And through you I can make treaties with England; also, I need your advice and help. If I win, Ripperda is overthrown!"

"I will go," said Dr. Shaw quietly.

"Good! To-morrow the Dey will give you safe conduct, and an escort of Spahis. I meet you at Arzew, if Allah wills! And bring the casket, and beware of a black burnoose."

With a brief salute he turned and was gone in haste.

The three men regarded one another in silence. Spence was smiling, the consul frowned gravely, Dr. Shaw was lost in abstracted thought.

"Zounds!" said Holden suddenly. "This is madness! Why do you go, gentlemen?"

"Because I want to see the ruins and Roman remains in the west," said Dr. Shaw. "I shall find much of interest. We must carefully compare Ptolemy and Abulfeda as we journey, Patrick! Besides, we go the errands of Christendom, if you want a better reason."

"And I," said Spence with a shrug, "because my fortune drifts that way, Mr. Holden. I am curious about that astrologer of Arzew; and I like this Moor! He is a real man."

The consul laughed shortly. "Have your own way. Pray heaven you bear luck with you—this Ripperda will menace all Europe if he be not pulled down!"

Spence, remembering that dark and tormented man, could well agree with such an assertion.

The situation seethed with intrigue. Ripperda was the actual ruler of Morocco. The Dey of Algiers, now allied with him, was furtively helping Mulai Ali. The dey was a sly fox. The Spaniards were tightly besieged in Oran. At sea, the Moorish fleet was supreme, under Admiral Perez. This renegade Carthusian, Ripperda's one actual friend in the world, was a great seaman.

It was typical of Ripperda that he should first intrigue to put Mulai Ali on the throne, then should turn against his puppet. Such madness had already ruined Ripperda in two countries.

With morning the three men went into the city. Holden and Shaw set off to interview the dey. Patrick Spence and a consulate guard went to the market to buy native garments.

Not far from the slave mart Spence halted before an open-fronted shop where an old Moor sat smoking a water pipe. Down the narrow street surged natives, soldiers, arrogant Spahis and Janissaries, horses and camel, shouting and disputing. The clamor was deafening. Spence let the negro bargain for the clothes he wanted.

Suddenly he became aware of a man in a black burnoose watching him. Remembering the warning of Mulai Ali, he turned; but the man was gone. Spence had a memory of a twisted face that was marked by a purplish birthmark about the right eye.

"Devil take it!" muttered Spence. "I'll suspect every black burnoose, unless I get myself in hand! That fellow was only staring at a Christian."

Upon returning to the consulate he had come within a few hundred feet of his destination; he was passing a low-arched doorway carved with the hand which spells the name of Allah. From the shadowed depths two figures darted out, plunged bodily upon him. Spence fell backward, the two men on top of him; as he fell, he glimpsed that twisted face with the birthmark.

He crashed down. A knife clashed on the stone beside his ear, but already his long arms were busy. He jerked one man over his head, heaved, twisted himself. He pulled clear, rolled over, and leaped to his feet in time to meet the rush of the man in the black burnoose. Spence drove his fist into the misshapen features, and the man reeled away.

At this instant the consulate negro dashed up, scimitar bared. A dozen other men converged on the scene. The two assassins paused not, but took to their heels, with a crowd streaming after them. Two minutes later, Patrick Spence was safe in the consulate.

He told Dr. Shaw of the incident, but the worthy divine related it to Holden in the light of an attempted robbery. Shaw feared lest the consul forbid the journey as too dangerous, and was taking no chances. So the matter was passed off without great comment.

That night the safe conduct having been provided, Dr. Shaw and Patrick Spence packed up. The consul provided them with letters of credit upon a Jew of Mequinez, while Shaw lingered lovingly over his rapier, maps and instruments—particularly the latter.

"This brass quadrant," he discoursed, "I had from Mr. Professor Bradley at Wanstead. It is so well graduated that I can even distinguish the division upon the limb to at least one-twelfth part of a degree. And this compass has the needle well touched—"

The good divine seemed quite oblivious to the fact that he was entering an almost unknown land, measuring wits against the most unscrupulous man of the age. Yet Dr. Shaw, as Spence knew well, was a shrewd comrade, reliable to the full, and quite able to use his sword as effectively as his instruments.

At dawn Spence wakened to the shrill cries of muezzins, lifting into the gray morning, calling the faithful to prayer. From all around they came; from the grand mosque, El Khebir, from the Mosque of Hassan, from the Zaouia, from the palace mosque, and others.

And in the courtyard the escort of twenty Spahis knelt at prayer, their gorgeous uniforms glittering in the new sunlight.

CHAPTER III.

"He cheats the stars, and they him, and both cheat fools; 'tis all one to me!"

SPENCE, with the leather box sewn in canvas and lashed at his saddle, rode westward with his friend and their escort. He was agreeably amazed by the ease and comfort of their journey, which followed the Chelif Valley road to Arzew.

Under the auspices of the swaggering Spahis, the guest house in each town was commandeered. In order to avoid the war zone about Oran, the route lay from Arzew to Tlemcen, thence to Fez by the ancient route of caravans and armies.

On the morning of the day they neared Arzew, Mulai Ali joined them. He rode toward their party, superbly mounted on a white Arab bearing the circle-bar brand of the Beni Rashid tribe. He was dressed in the richest of pale green and pink silks. From the gold-twisted fillet at his brow to the red Moroccan boots, he looked the chieftain. He was alone.

"Well met, *señores!*"

He greeted Spence and Dr. Shaw in Spanish.

"All is safe?"

"All is safe," said Spence, knowing that the query referred to the leather box.

"You ride like a king," said the divine, perplexed, "yet we thought to find you in danger and disguised! What means it, Mulai Ali?"

"A good omen!" The Moor laughed. "Ripperda has not yet rejoined the army before Oran. Hassan Bey has made me welcome at Arzew. Before Ripperda learns I am there, I shall be gone. After leaving Arzew we must push hard for the south."

"Then," said Dr. Shaw, "you aim to enter Morocco by the back door and seize the throne while Ripperda and the army lie before Oran?"

"Exactly." Mulai Ali lifted his hand and pointed. "Here comes Hassan Bey to meet you!"

Arzew opened before them, with its ex-

tensive groves, its rocky precipices, its ruins. A dust cloud upon the road resolved itself into a hundred horsemen headed by Hassan Bey—a hard-fighting old Turk whose wine-frosted nose showed small regard for religious precepts.

With a great firing of guns and clamor, the parties met. Escorted by this guard of honor, Spence and Dr. Shaw entered the town. The bey had made ready quarters for them in the kasbah, or citadel, and received them with an entertainment that was lavish. The feast lasted far into the night.

In the morning Spence wakened to find Mulai Ali present. The Moor and Dr. Shaw were engaged in a discussion of religious points, which ended when the worthy divine sallied forth to inspect the ruins and make notes. Mulai Ali remained while Spence broke his fast.

"Well," asked the Moor, "and did you see the man in the black burnoose?"

Spence looked up sharply and described the attempted murder. "Who is the man, then?"

"His name is Gholam Mahmoud. He was once a Janissary; he is now one of Ripperda's bodyguard of renegades. We shall probably find him ahead of us on the road."

"H-m! You seem little concerned," said Spence with a shrewd glance.

"The event is in the hands of God, the compassionate! I saw the astrologer last night, and go this morning to receive my horoscope."

"Good! This astrologer is a slave, eh? An old man? And English?"

Mulai Ali smiled in a singular fashion.

"Yes, captured by Hassan from an English ship, and kept here secretly. Hassan is afraid of the astrologer, yet refuses to sell the slave to me. I have need of the stars to guide me, and should like to have the slave in our company, if possible."

"Oh!" Spence studied the other man, and chuckled. "You will aid him to escape, then?"

"After I have eaten the salt of Hassan?" The Moor gestured in dissent. "I could not do this. Of course, a Christian has no scruples, and might manage it."

Spence broke into a laugh.

"Certainly, I have no scruples! Let us be frank, Mulai Ali. You want me to steal this astrologer for you?"

"Let us ask the stars about it," said the other evasively.

Clearly, the Moor would not speak frankly; yet eagerness struggled against gloom in his eyes. The man was strongly tempted, thus to split hairs with his religious scruples.

"I will attend to it," said Spence curtly. "When can we see the astrologer?"

"Now." A curious smile stole into the bearded features. "You are ready?"

Spence nodded, rose, and followed.

They descended to the kasbah courtyard, where their Spahis and the garrison Janissaries were fraternizing. Hence, Mulai Ali passed into the gardens adjoining, the guards saluting him respectfully. They came to a square, commodious tower of stone, centered in a small grove of pomegranates.

Before the doorway of this tower squatted a huge black eunuch, half asleep, across his knees the glistening blade of a broad scimitar. Sighting them, he sprang up and saluted Mulai Ali, then loosened the bar of the door and stood aside. Plainly, Mulai Ali had unquestioned access to Hassan's astrologer.

"After you, *señor*," said the Moor.

Spence found himself in a well-lighted room, hung with gorgeous stuffs. Upon a stone stairway to the right appeared an old hag, who addressed them in Spanish.

"It is too early, *señores*—"

"Say that Mulai Ali the Idrisi is here," spoke up the Moor curtly. "And with him a Christian, who seeks guidance from the stars. Hasten, slave!"

Mumbling imprecations, the hag scuttled up the stairs. In a moment she was back again and beckoning them to follow.

They entered a chamber which had evidently been long occupied by gentry of the same profession. A stuffed crocodile, moth-eaten and musty, hung on wires from the ceiling; about the room were skulls, stuffed birds, instruments inherited from the Moors of elder years.

Above a curtained doorway hung a handsome pentacle of brass; beside it was the Arabic nine-squared diagram, the Haraz al

Mabarak—a very ornate piece of work in wood, the ciphers inlaid with silver.

The astrologer appeared suddenly before them.

If he had stared before, now Spence stared with twofold amazement. No doddering old man was this astrologer—no man at all—but a woman, wearing a white burnoose. As he stared at her, so she stared at him, her eyes wide; dark eyes, set in a face that was suddenly white. Her hands gripped the curtain beside her in a tense grasp.

"We are here, *señorita,*" said Mulai Ali courteously. "I have told my friend, Captain Spence, that you are the most wonderful woman in the world. If my horoscope is finished, the fact will soon be proved to his satisfaction."

The astrologer trembled slightly, then forced herself to speak.

"I have it here—if you will be seated—"

Spence controlled himself to silence, bowed, and seated himself.

Upon him was dumb amazement as the woman came forward. Woman? Nay, but a girl, and no Moor, either, but English! Despite the suspense, the emotion, that had gripped her, she was now completely mistress of herself. And she was beautiful, Spence realized; not with the coldly perfect lines of classic beauty, but with character that made for personality. Dark eyes, dark hair, a sweetly girlish face—and an astrologer withal! Here was a marvel!

"I have written it in Castilian," she was saying, giving Mulai Ali a scroll, which evidently held the horoscope. "You may study it at leisure—and it may be unpleasant."

"Allah controls all," said the Moor impassively. "Will my enterprise succeed?"

"It may. You are ruled by Taurus, which augurs well, though Mars and Scorpio have a strong influence. Tell me, *señor!* If you abandon this enterprise, you will live long and happily, a man of wealth, but holding no position or rank. Will you abandon it?"

A flash lighted the eyes of the Moor.

"And if I hold to it?"

"Then you will not live long—ten years, at a venture. They will be crowded with great events: wars, conquests, triumphs! Your fortune will increase to the end. You will sit upon a throne. But the end—ah! I know not the customs of your country; but it is cruel."

A harsh laugh broke from Mulai Ali.

"But I know them. Well, then—I have to choose between a long life of obscurity or a short life of greatness, at the end of which I shall be sawn asunder or burned to death by the Spaniards. Is that it?"

The girl inclined her head gravely.

"That is it."

"By Allah, ten years is enough for any man! I have chosen. Now, *señorita,* this is the Captain Spence of whom we have spoken. Speak quickly, lest Hassan suspect that we remain overlong with you."

The girl turned to Spence, her eyes alight. "You will help me?" she said. "I am English. I was traveling to Venice with my father, a student of astronomy, when the pirates captured me. Him they killed—since then I have struggled against disaster—"

"Madam, I am wholly at your service," said Spence quietly. "Your name?"

"Elizabeth Parks."

"Then, Mistress Betty, have no more fear!" Spence laughed with assumed lightness. "You shall go with us into Morocco, if that be possible. Can you trust any here?"

"None," she said, her lips atremble. "There was talk of the bey's harem—but I knew enough of the stars to make him fear me. It was my only chance. I managed to avert danger—"

"Fear not," said Spence. "We must depart now, but you shall hear from us. I take the responsibility on my own shoulders, Mulai Ali. You agree?"

"Very well."

The Moor made a gesture.

"You trust us, *señorita?*"

The girl smiled suddenly. "Have I not read of you in the stars?"

Spence brought her fingers to his lips, and with smiling assurance, departed, her eyes haunting him. He followed Mulai Ali to the garden, then, at a word, walked off among the trees and left the Moor talking with the black eunuch.

This amazing and unexpected meeting had overwhelmed him. He could realize how this quick-witted and desperate girl had seized one slim hope of escaping the harem; how she had worked upon the besotted and superstitious Hassan Bey until he feared her more than he desired her.

"By Heavens, what a woman!" thought Spence.

He turned as the Moor came toward him.

"Well, *señor*, what think you of the bride I promised?"

"I do not steal brides, Mulai Ali. I help her, because she is a woman. I desire no wife, however."

"You might do worse," said the other. "I have arranged with that eunuch, her sole guard. He will leave her with us and accompany us into Morocco."

"Can you trust him?"

The Moor smiled.

"He would rather be chief eunuch of a Sultan's harem than a slave in Arzew."

Spence studied the Moor.

"You seem confident, my friend! Yet you have no army. Ripperda's assassins are seeking you—"

"Allah rules all things; who would dispute the ways of God? If a thing is ordained, it will come to pass.

"Besides," added Mulai Ali dryly, "I am not without friends. Do you fear to accompany me, who go alone to seek a throne?"

"Fear?" Spence laughed, and put out his hand. "Luck be with you, and my aid!"

"Good. You and the astrologer must leave here to-night and ride ahead. We follow in the morning—you must warn Dr. Shaw to be ready. Come and give your orders."

He led the way to the courtyard, summoned two of the Spahis, and ordered them to do as Spence commanded. The American issued curt orders, which the Moor affirmed with a nod.

If the Spahis were surprised, they made no comment; their obedience to Mulai Ali was implicit. Spence fancied that they, too, looked forward to high commands in El Magrib when Mulai Ali won his venture.

"If you'll instruct that black eunuch what to do," said Spence to the Moor, "you may then leave all to me and dismiss the affair as settled. I know no Arabic, and I fancy the eunuch has no Spanish."

Mulai Ali nodded his assent, and departed.

Spence returned to his quarters and waited until Dr. Shaw returned. Then he informed the divine as to their divided journey. He said nothing about Mistress Betty; not that he doubted the hearty coöperation of his friend, but Shaw rather fancied his character of envoy, and would be spared by ignorance a good deal of worry.

"You can leave early in the morning, doctor?" he concluded.

"Certainly. I have carefully copied the inscription on the hypogæum, and there is little else to tempt me. Why are you thus going ahead, Patrick? I like it not."

Spence chuckled. "Private affairs," he said cheerfully. "Hassan is giving a feast to-night; kindly make no remark upon my disappearance, but get off early in the morning with Mulai Ali. Ride swiftly to Tlemcen. We'll meet there. Believe me, it is better that you know nothing of my errand just yet."

"Very well, very well," assented Shaw, not without a sigh. "But, Patrick, if there is anything forward that smacks of fighting, I pray you not to let my cloth prevent me from having some share! I am an excellent hand with the rapier, as you know—"

Spence clapped him on the shoulder.

"Cheer up, Shaw! I promise that you'll have fighting in plenty before you ever see Algiers again! And now give me a spare flint or two for my pistols, and I'll ask no more."

CHAPTER IV.

"Methinks he hath no drowning mark upon him; his complexion is perfect gallows."

THAT night Hassan Bey, in honor of his guests, held high revel. There was no lack of wine, since the Turks paid small heed to Islamic prohibition.

Further, there were entertainments by companies of dancing women, both of the town and desert, and by magicians of the Aissoua tribe. An hour before midnight the scene waxed riotous, for Hassan Bey and his captains were roaring drunk.

It was then that Patrick Spence quietly departed.

At his quarters he secured his few belongings, cloaked himself in a dark burnoose, and left the kasbah. He entered the gardens, found the guards in drunken slumber, and encountered no one until he came near the square tower of the astrologer. Then a dark shape arose before him, the starlight glittered on a naked blade, and he recognized the distorted shape of Yimnah, the eunuch.

Spence threw back the cowl of his burnoose, and the eunuch gestured toward the tower. A voice reached him.

"Captain Spence? Thank Heaven! I was afraid you could not get away—"

"Let us go at once, Mistress Betty! May I have your hand?"

He bowed over her hand, guided her to the waiting eunuch, and led the way from the gardens. Near the entrance he spoke again to the girl, quietly.

"We must ride to Tlemcem at once, and there meet Mulai Ali and our party. Do you speak any Arabic?"

"Enough to get along with," said the girl quietly.

Outside the kasbah, in the shadow of its high turreted walls, the starlight shone on the waiting Spahis and horses. From the girl came a deep sigh of relaxation.

"It seems a dream," she murmured. "To leave thus, unhindered, unquestioned."

"Let us assign the honor to Providence, and make the most of it," said Spence. "Now, mount quickly! We must be far from here when the muezzin mounts again to the minaret!"

The Spahis brought up the horses. Spence aided the girl into the high saddle, lashed behind her the small bundle she had fetched, adjusted her burnoose, and sprang to his own beast. Yimnah was already mounted.

All five walked their horses from the shadow of the citadel, put the beasts at a canter, and swept away from the unwalled city to the southwest. No common steeds were these, but blooded barbs, the finest in Hassan's stables, calmly appropriated by the Spahis.

Hour after hour through the night they rode, past the long sandy salt pits and the lake of Sibka, through silent and dark villages, along lonely wastes. Spence talked with the girl as they rode, telling his own story and touching upon their errand.

"It is a mad errand," he concluded, "yet Mulai Ali is a kingly man and may succeed."

"His horoscope truly reads him into a throne," said Mistress Betty. "Do not laugh at me! This business is not all charlatanry, although I have shamed the astronomer's art with my wiles. I knew of your presence in Algiers, through gossip, and set out to effect my rescue. Was that selfish? Perhaps. And yet—"

"No, not selfish; it was wholly admirable!" exclaimed Spence. "We ride south; you are free; Mulai Ali goes to friends and a throne; Shaw goes to pull down Ripperda—and all by a woman's wit! I am humble before you."

So they rode until the stars were paling into the false dawn. Then one of the Spahis called softly in his own tongue. Mistress Betty heard the words, and translated.

"He says that some one is riding hard on the road behind us!"

Spence drew rein.

"Forward! No protest, dear lady—forward, all of you!"

The party swept on, disappeared along the dim road. Spence waited. Presently he caught the hard beat of hoofs and sighted a vague figure. With a hail he sent his beast out into the center of the road. The onsweeping rider uttered a sharp, harsh cry, then a musket roared out and Spence heard the bullet as it whined past his head.

His ready pistol made instant reply. The other horse plunged; the rider fell headlong and lay motionless. Spence dismounted and fell to searching the man.

He was rewarded by a folded paper in the knotted pouch-end of the worsted gir-

dle. Finding nothing more, Spence bound the Moor and left him.

He struck into a gallop after his own party, and within twenty minutes had come up with them. Then, not pausing, he pushed them on at all speed, for time was precious in the extreme.

When the true dawn glimmered into daylight, they halted beside a rivulet to water and refresh the horses. Here Spence inspected the paper he had captured. It was a note written in Arabic, and neither the girl nor Yimnah could read it, so he called in the Spahis. From their reading, Mistress Betty translated the note. It was unsigned, and was addressed simply to Gholam Mahmoud. It read:

> The hawk is at Arzew and rides south. Catch him this side Udjde or his talons will be plunged into El Magrib. Slay him. Lay the snare at the Cisterns, with Allah's help!

"Ah!" exclaimed Mistress Betty eagerly. "By 'the hawk' is meant Mulai Ali—this must be from a spy! They know he is coming! The Cisterns is a place west of Tlemcen on the highway."

"And Gholam Mahmoud, he of the twisted face, is ahead," said Spence. "Well, forewarned is forearmed! How far have we come?"

"Nearly halfway." She pointed ahead. "There is the Maila River; beyond, the Sharf el Graab, or Raven Crag—that high pinnacle of rock. At the river I shall show you a famous place."

Thankful that she seemed cheerful, even gay, Spence called to horse. They rode on.

Within ten minutes they halted at the river ford. Here the high banks were gullied to a depth of fifteen feet; a dense growth of trees concealed the river and opposite bank. The girl turned to Spence with a glow in her eyes, pointing to the sandy beach and ford.

"I used to read in an old French book," she said, "how, when the Spaniards were catching the great pirate Barbarossa, they pursued him to a river, where he scattered all his treasure, hoping in that way to delay them.

"I even remember the words: '*Il laissoit couler de tems en tems de l'or et de l'argent par le chemin.*' This is the very place, where we are standing! It was here that he strewed his gold and silver—"

The words died suddenly on her lips. The Spahis also had been speaking of Barbarossa, for this place was famous in legend; they were now silent, staring. Spence looked up swiftly.

A rough, boisterous voice had risen ahead—a voice that sang in reckless gayety; a Spanish voice, twanging out the vowels with peasant whine. Some one was approaching from the other side of the ford. Spence looked at the Spahis, made a swift gesture. They wheeled their horses and vanished among the trees.

The voice of the singer came closer. The eunuch, Yimnah, baring his scimitar, slipped from the saddle and glided forward to the masking trees. Then he was back, his thick lips chattering words of fear, his limbs trembling.

"He says it is the ghost of Barbarossa," said Mistress Betty.

Spence chuckled.

"Wait here, then."

His musket ready, he urged the horse forward into the gully. Here he waited, motionless, looking at the man splashing and singing as he made his way across the shallows.

A big and burly man he was. The ruffianly face bore a spade beard and two enormous mustaches, all of flaming red, matching his long hair. Not until the horse plunged at the bank did the man see Spence sitting there above him. He clapped hand to sword—a long blade at his hip. Spence threw back his cowl, and the man cried out in surprise:

"Ha! A Christian!"

"No blustering, *señor*," said Spence sternly. "Your name and errand."

The glittering eyes drove to right and left as the bushes crackled. He saw that he was ambushed, and a sudden laugh burst from his lips. No Moor, this, but a Spaniard.

"Well met, caballero!" he cried jovially. "My name is Lazaro de Polan, though in some parts I am known as Barbarroja. I am a soldier by trade; can teach you tricks with saber or espadon, scimitar or brack-

mard, Italian blade or rapier of Toledo—near which holy city is Polan, my birthplace. My errand is to seek employment wherever it may be found."

"You are a renegade?" queried Spence.

The glittering eyes flamed at him, then laughed.

"Ha! I was captured by the Moors, caballero, saved my head by a less essential sacrifice, became an officer in their army, and made enough money to purchase my freedom. I am now seeking service as a guard or guide, for I know all the roads. Hire me, caballero! All the army knows me, and I can be of much service to you."

Spence regarded the man. There were many renegades, and this Barbarroja was more than a mere braggart, or he would not be traveling alone in Christian garb. The fellow could be useful in a dozen capacities, particularly if he were well known among the Moors.

"Done. I am Captain Spence, with safe conduct from the Dey of Algiers. Journey with us to Tlemcen. If you are no liar, I shall talk wages with you there. Is that agreeable?"

"Perfectly, Señor Capitan!" Barbarroja gestured grandly in assent.

"And I do not care to answer questions."

"Nor I to ask, caballero!"

With a shrug, the renegade turned his horse to the ford again.

Spence called up his party. On the farther bank Barbarroja waited, his glittering eyes scrutinizing them, then he waved his wide hat and set out in the van. Spence sent the two Spahis to bear the fellow company, and rode beside Mistress Betty, telling her how he had engaged the man. To his surprise, the girl frowned thoughtfully.

"There are evil men on the roads," she said. "I misdoubt me that this renegade—"

"You fear him!" said Spence. "Then I shall dismiss the fellow at once."

"No, no!" she said hastily. "It would be silly, for there was no reason behind my words. Doubtless he is as honest as another, and may be useful, for he seems a stout fellow."

So Patrick Spence, thinking more of the girl beside him than of the red-bearded ruffian ahead, rode on to the south and felt well pleased with fate.

CHAPTER V.

"Wert thou the devil, and wor'st it on thy horn, it should be challenged!"

AFTER nightfall the party rode into Tlemcen, a great circuit of ruins inclosing a small walled space, perched disconsolately amid remnants of forgotten kingdoms. Barbarroja undertook to lead them to a quiet tavern, where they would meet no unpleasant questioning.

A cunning rogue was this, and evidently known to the city guards, whom he passed with a friendly hail. He led them through filthy, narrow streets, and near the ruinous mosque of El Haloui, knocked at a small doorway. A cautious wicket opened, and presently the door was swung ajar by a greasy fellow whom Spence took for a Levantine renegade.

The place proved decent enough. For Mistress Betty was secured in an upstairs chamber; a room opening from this, with a balcony overlooking the street, served Spence and Yimnah. A third room sufficed Barbarroja and the Spahis. Returning from his inspection, Spence joined the party below.

Leaving the three men to unsaddle he led the girl and Yimnah up the narrow stairs that ascended from the courtyard. The host waited at the head of the stairs to light them.

As they came to the upper gallery encircling the courtyard Mistress Betty stumbled. She caught the arm of Spence to save herself, but the cowl of her burnoose was jerked away, revealing in the lantern-light her features. And, in the shadows behind their host, Spence caught sight of another face turned upon them—a ghastly face, twisted awry, with a purple birthmark like a patch over the right eye.

A startled oath broke from Spence. He dashed the greasy host aside and leaped forward; adroitly, the Levantine tripped him. As he fell he saw that face fade into the darkness.

Regaining his feet he hurled himself into the obscurity. From ahead he heard running feet, then the slam of a door. Realizing that his pursuit was folly, Spence returned to the Levantine, took the man by the throat, and shook him savagely.

"Lead me to that man, Gholam Mahmoud!" he cried, hoarse with anger. "Quickly!"

The Levantine blurted out that he knew nothing of such a man; there were many in the tavern; how should he know which was meant? He knew no such name. Mistress Betty, who had caught up the fallen lantern, interposed.

"We are in no position to seek trouble, Captain Spence. I pray you, let this matter drop, at least until our friends arrive!"

Spence released the host.

"You are right," he said. "Yet that man was watching us, and saw your face when you stumbled. However, let it be!"

Disposing the girl in her quarters, Spence joined Yimnah in the outer chamber and wearily flung himself on his pallet.

He could swear that he had seen the face of Gholam Mahmoud, the confidential agent of Ripperda, the man against whom Mulai Ali had warned him. Spence knew he had not erred. As he thought of how those distorted, coldly lustful features had peered at the face of Mistress Betty, those predatory and malignant features, the American gripped his nails into his palms with impotent rage. But finally he slept.

In the thin grayness of morning Spence wakened to lie drowsily, eyes half closed. The drone of Yimnah's snores filled the room. Through this drone pierced a thin nasal cry from the minaret of the near-by mosque: "Come ye to prayer! Come ye to salvation! Devotion is better than sleep—"

"Here am I at thy call, oh, God!" muttered the eunuch, and stirred to his prayers.

Spence rose, slipped on his shoes. He went to the balcony that overhung the street, opened the lattice, and stepped outside for a breath of the morning air, tipped with mountain frost.

As he stood thus, drinking deeply into his lungs the keen air, he heard the creak of the tavern door from below. He glanced idly downward, wondering who was astir at this hour of prayer. He sighted a figure —and started suddenly. A black burnoose! As though drawn by the slight movement above, the figure looked upward. From Spence broke a savage cry.

"Ha, devil!"

He was only ten feet above the street level, and unhesitatingly bestrode the balcony. The rotten wood crashed away beneath him, yet he alighted on his feet and flung himself at Gholam Mahmoud. The latter, however, had already taken warning and was gone.

Darting back into the doorway the man slipped through and slammed the door in the face of Spence. The American burst it open ere it could be bolted, and dashed into the courtyard. He saw the renegade ahead of him, leaping for the staircase.

Sure of his prey, Spence gave no heed to the men around, but drove after Gholam Mahmoud. The latter reached the stairs slightly in the lead, took them two at a leap. Near the top he hurled a pistol under his arm; the heavy weapon struck Spence in the breast and threw him out of his stride for an instant.

Aided by this respite the renegade gained the gallery and took to his heels. Pursuer and pursued were silent, for death lay between them. Three strides in the lead, Gholam Mahmoud sprang into a doorway, slammed the door, shot the bolt home.

With a curse, Spence gathered momentum and hurled himself bodily at the wood. The door splintered visibly. Drawing back, he flung forward again. With a rending crash, the door was carried off its hinges, and Spence went staggering into the room beyond. He found it empty.

Ahead Spence descried another door, through which the renegade must have gone. He did not pause, but flung himself bodily at it, and struck the door with all his weight in the blow. Where he had expected resistance he found none.

The door drove open, lightly and freely. This unlooked-for give threw Spence off balance, sent him reeling into the room beyond. Something struck him a crashing blow behind the ear, and he fell in a limp heap—unaware even who had struck him.

"Neatly taken on the wing!" Barbarroja stepped forward, viewed the senseless figure complacently, and twirled his immense mustache. "There was a proper blow! Hold! Not so fast—"

He whirled suddenly, caught the arm of Gholam Mahmoud, stayed the dagger thrust meant for the unconscious Spence.

The two men glared into each other's eyes for an instant.

"He is mine!" snarled Gholam Mahmoud.

"Not at all," retorted Barbarroja coolly. "He is mine, and I am entirely ready to enforce the claim with three inches of steel in your ribs, caballero! I do not want the fool killed, just yet. Suit yourself whether we are to talk profitably, or to fight!"

The other calmed himself by an effort. Barbarroja released him.

"Now let us bind and gag him, wrap his head in a cloth, and throw him in the next room. Then we may talk in peace."

"He is a devil!" snapped Gholam Mahmoud.

The other twirled his mustache and laughed.

"I am something of a devil myself, as my master, the Sherif Abdallah, is aware. You and your master, Pasha Ripperda, are devils twain; but there are many ranks of devils, no less than of angels. So look to it! Now let us attend to him, and then have our talk."

Spence disposed of, Barbarroja whirled jauntily upon the sulky Gholam Mahmoud.

"You have desired to see me? I am here. My master, the sherif, is in Fez. Your master, Pasha Ripperda, is somewhere up north like a lion on the prowl. Let us talk, and make history!"

Gholam Mahmoud scowled. Stripped of his black burnoose, this white man with the Persian name showed himself to be a bony man of huge strength. His naked arms were in full sight. To an intelligent eye one of those arms betrayed a terrible and significant thing.

Upon the right arm was boldly tattooed the figure of a dolphin!

In that design showed the whole history of the man—his birth, education, achievements, his past and present! To all the Moslem world, this symbol spoke louder than letters of gold.

It told that this man was born a Christian, made captive in youth, and educated in the schools of the Janissaries; that so great was his ability as to win place in the Thirty-first Orta, or cohort, stationed around the Sultan. This entire body were the picked men of Islam, and upon the right arm of each man was tattooed the insignia of their cohort—the proudest token of the Sultan's army, the dolphin crest!

This man stood and scowled at Barbarroja, his twisted features malignant.

"We might work together," he said. "We have heard of each other. I am on business of my master, Ripperda; you are on business of the sherif. Does our business lie with the same man?"

"It does," affirmed Barbarroja. "Your Ripperda has burned his fingers with Mulai Ali, eh? And perhaps your master wants to regain a certain little box of leather?"

At this Gholam Mahmoud started.

"Ah! Does the sherif know about that casket?"

Barbarroja grinned.

"No, but I do! What use informing the sherif of everything? I shall take the casket to him—"

"What, you have it?"

"No, no, but I have it under my thumb. Come, let us be frank. Will your Ripperda Pasha pay well for the casket, caballero? I need money. Come, speak frankly! Let us join forces."

"Good," said Gholam Mahmoud. "My orders are to kill Mulai Ali before he reaches Udjde, and to regain the box of leather. Ripperda will destroy Mulai Ali utterly."

"Having changed his mind"—Barbarroja chuckled—"our affairs coincide, caballero! My master, the sherif, is particular about keeping his seat on the throne. So, then! You wish to kill Mulai Ali because Ripperda has changed his mind; I wish to kill Mulai Ali because the sherif has not changed his mind. Is that plain?"

"Plain as your beard." The other smiled sourly. "This Captain Spence—"

"Is my affair; leave him to me." Barbarroja yawned. "He will join Mulai Ali

later, perhaps to-night. Now, shall we work together or not?"

"Yes," said Gholam Mahmoud curtly.

"And what gain we by this mutual good will? How burns your end of the candle? Speak up!"

Gholam Mahmoud smiled evilly. "I need no money. I will take the woman in your party."

"Oh, *dios de mi alma*, but I understand now! You wish her?"

"Exactly. Who is she?"

"Devil take me if I know. Since she is not the wife of Spence she must be the daughter of Shaw, the English envoy. Well, take her, if you like! But where do I come in by this door of good luck?"

"Milk Ripperda," said Gholam Mahmoud brusquely. "Kill Mulai Ali and the others, take the woman and the box. Let my master, Ripperda, ransom the box, eh? Money to you, woman to me."

"*Por dios*, it is agreed!" thundered Barbarroja grandly. "Upon the word of a caballero! How to do the work? I have the sherif's seal and no lack of men to obey me. Do you set the trap, and I will lead the partridges into it."

They conferred together.

An hour later Barbarroja strolled into the other room, humming a gay air. He affected to be seeking some lost article, muttering about it between snatches of his song, and cursing the Moors for thieves. He stumbled over a prostrate form in the corner, and swore.

"Here is another of the drunken dogs—by the saints! If these are not the boots of the Captain Spence—holy mother! The valiant captain trussed and gagged like a goose—"

With a monstrous show of surprise he cut Spence loose. His amazement was so unbounded that Spence broke into a harsh laugh as he rose.

"Did you never see a bound man before, fool? Listen! Have you seen a man here—a man with a twisted face, marked at birth over the right eye?"

"Aye!" Redbeard scratched his nose. "I saw such a one half an hour ago—he was just leaving the inn, mounted on a good horse, too—"

Spence swore, perceiving that black burnoose had escaped him. He hastened back to the rooms he had quitted, rubbing his sore wrists and feeling anything but joyful. He found the canvas-covered box intact with his saddlery.

It would not have pleased him to know how Barbarroja was laughing at the moment. This redbeard much enjoyed his little joke, and fancied himself a fellow of infinite wit, a fancy which was destined to work him some ill before long.

CHAPTER VI.

"It will toast cheese, and it will endure cold as another man's sword will."

SPENCE at once sent Barbarroja and a Spahi on the back trail to meet Dr. Shaw. He himself spent most of the day resting or talking with Mistress Betty. He could not restrain his admiration for the way in which she had controlled her fate.

Her father had taught her to draw a horoscope with some skill. When he spoke of getting his own drawn, however, she laughed and looked at him for a moment.

"Are you serious, my dear captain?"

"Middling so," acknowledged Spence whimsically. "If the future can be read—"

"Your future, sir, can better be read in your face than in the stars—a future of much calm strength, of firmness, of self-mastery. But tell me! How long do we remain here?"

"Until we get word from Shaw and Mulai Ali. We shall meet them outside town. We dare not linger here in Tlemcen, lest messengers from Hassan Bey raise the pursuit after us. And I have found that Gholam Mahmoud has indeed been here."

He said nothing of his misadventure, lest he alarm her, but recounted what Barbarroja had said about seeing the former Janissary. The girl frowned over this.

"We are in a strange vortex of intrigue," she mused. "Mulai Ali, if he reaches Morocco, can gain the throne; the present sherif is hated by the whole land, for he is a mere tool in the hand of Ripperda. This renegade grandee of Spain must be a snaky sort of man!"

"He has qualities," admitted Spence, and told of his meeting with the famous Ripperda. "From the note we captured we can guess that this Gholam Mahmoud means to assassinate Mulai Ali, if possible. I find that from here we must go to Udjde, passing the Cisterns on the way. We may have trouble there, but we shall have to see what Mulai Ali decides."

It was afternoon when the messengers returned. Barbarroja bowed grandly to the girl, twirled his mustache, and delivered himself of his report. Mulai Ali and his party were waiting outside the city for Spence. The American turned to the girl.

"How soon can you leave?"

"Now." Smiling she reached for her white burnoose.

"Then I'll have the horses saddled at once."

Fifteen minutes later they rode out of Tlemcen by the north gate, unquestioned.

For an hour they cantered easily through a fertile champaign, more than once meeting parties of soldiery, wild, uncouth, mountaineers of the west, who exchanged a sulky *marhaba* with Barbarroja and passed on. At length they came to their companions, who were camped in a grove of trees beside a rivulet.

Dr. Shaw came forth to meet them, anxiety and delight in his countenance. Laughing, Spence swung from the saddle, and then presented his astonished friend to Mistress Betty.

"Dr. Shaw is entirely unaware of your story," he concluded, "so I shall leave him with you for explanations while I speak with our leader."

He swung off to join Mulai Ali. Looking back, he saw the divine helping Mistress Betty to dismount, and chuckled at the expression on his friend's face.

Mulai Ali was sucking at a water pipe that bubbled and hissed like a lading camel under a wide tree. Spence made a brief report of their journey, and handed over the note which he had captured.

The somber eyes of Mulai Ali glowed hotly at hearing of Gholam Mahmoud, and burned again as they read the note. Spence lighted his pipe from the perfumed bowl of the chibouk.

"Great is God, and infinite; God, God, and God, the compassionate!" exclaimed Mulai Ali after a little silence. "He ordereth all things; the ways of men are plain before him."

"True enough," said Spence. "I suppose you left Arzew before our flight was discovered?"

Mulai Ali nodded.

"Although, as Allah knows, I had nothing to do with the escape of his astrologer, Hassan will suspect and send after us. We must ride on. We cannot avoid the Cisterns if we are to reach Udjde. Since we cannot go back, we must go forward."

The Moor was silent again, evidently pondering some plan. At length Mulai Ali smiled.

"Here is the situation. This accursed Gholam Mahmoud will ambush me at the Cisterns, being charged with my death. Let him do it, and Allah upon him. Where Ripperda is no man knows; he is like a flea—he may be in Tlemcen to-morrow! But the danger is directed against me. You and the others have nothing to fear. The ambush will not be set against you.

"Therefore, all of you ride forward, taking Barbarroja and two of the Spahis. Ride to Udjde; the governor is my kinsman, and I will give you a letter to him. Tell him that I shall remain at the Cisterns, awaiting help from him. The Spahis will go with me, following you slowly. There are ancient ruins at the Cisterns, and we can easily defend ourselves there until help comes from Udjde. You understand?"

Spence nodded. This plan assured Mistress Betty a modicum of risk, and suited him well.

"The leather box is safe?"

"Yes. Will you not take and keep it yourself, now—"

"No! The relics of the Moorish kings in that box will swing every chieftain in Morocco behind me. The copies of secret Spanish treaties are invaluable. The casket is safer with you; the stars declare that your fate and that of the astrologer are bound up with mine. It is evident that Allah, who alone knoweth all things, has so ordained the matter."

"Very well," Spence nodded. "Write

your letter, and I'll tell the others of the plan."

He rejoined Dr. Shaw and the maid, whom he found seated beneath a tree in earnest discussion. They listened in silence to Mulai Ali's plan, and Shaw nodded quick assent.

"A good plan, Patrick! It assures little risk to any of us. We shall start at once."

"Then I shall go and thank Mulai Ali for his kindness," said the girl, and rising, departed.

Spence met the eyes of Dr. Shaw, and smiled.

"I suppose you're going to rake me over the coals for my imprudence, doctor?"

"Tut, tut, Patrick! You did exactly right, my boy! Do you know she is a most amazing young woman? I was just expounding to her my theory in regard to the *euroclydon* of Saint Paul's history, as opposed to the Vulgate reading; as you know, Saint Luke was present—"

"My dear doctor," intervened Spence, "you must give me your views on that point later. At present you had best gird up your loins and get ready. Our business makes us set out at once and ride hard to Udjde. Suppose you get Mulai Ali's letter, while I rouse the men."

Dr. Shaw sighed and obeyed placidly.

Spence found Barbarroja relating, with huge gusto, horrible tales of the Beni Snouss and other desert tribes through whose country they must pass later; the credulous Spahis listened agape, swallowing all his fancies. Spence angrily ordered him to saddle up.

"We are to ride ahead of the others. You will guide us. Two of the Spahis go also. Hasten!"

He turned to saddle his own horse, and did not observe that Barbarroja gazed after him with fallen jaw, as though completely taken aback by this information.

Within twenty minutes the start was made—Spence and Barbarroja leading, Shaw and Mistress Betty following, the two Spahis bringing up the rear with Yimnah. The party would reach the Cisterns some time that night.

Spence had no talk with Dr. Shaw until later. He noted that Barbarroja had lost his bold and jaunty air, seemed silent and uneasy, and often pawed his huge beard as though in deep thought; nor did the man respond to conversation. Spence thought little of it.

At the halt for sunset prayer, in which all save the three Christians joined, Dr. Shaw drew his horse alongside that of Spence.

"Patrick, I am told by Mistress Elizabeth that when you engaged this ruffianly red-beard, you told him you would discuss wages with him at Tlemcen. What agreement reached you?"

"Eh? Why, none! I forgot it."

Shaw shook his head.

"That looks bad, my son! If the man were what he seemed—well, well, let be. I gather that we reach the Cisterns to-night, and halt until morning?"

"No halts," said Spence curtly. "We must save Mulai Ali's neck, and that means hard riding. It's only fifty miles to Udjde, our horses are in good condition, and we must push on."

"But stop a few moments at the Cisterns," pleaded the doctor anxiously. "I have heard of notable inscriptions there, on a pillar near the wells. The moon will be at the full to-night, and I can copy it in a few moments."

Smiling, Spence agreed. So small a boon, which meant so much to Shaw, could not be denied.

After the prayer and a brief repast, they went on again at a brisk pace. An hour after nightfall the moon rose, full and glorious, lightening all the cold countryside with silver brilliance. Muffled against the cold, the party pressed their horses vigorously.

It lacked an hour of midnight when they approached El Joube, or the Cisterns.

There was no native village here; only a bleak hillside, covered with ancient ruins, where two brackish wells supplied water for travelers. The moon was at her zenith. The place, with its white marbles and broken columns, and jackals howling afar, was the very epitome of desolation. Spence sighed in relief when he saw that the camping ground was empty. Evidently they

were ahead of any ambush. Mulai Ali might have come with them after all.

"No unsaddling!" ordered Spence. "We stop for food and water, then on again. May I spread cloaks on the ground for you, Mistress Betty?"

Shaw, forgetting all else, was already scrambling away amid the ruins.

Spence laid out his burnoose for the girl, fed his horse, and joined her with dates and couscous. Presently he lighted his pipe, and was getting it to draw when he heard the voice of Shaw from the tumbled ruins, excitement in its tone.

"Patrick! Come here at once and see what I have found!"

Laughing, Spence essayed to find the divine. This was no small matter; but, after circling a huge cistern, and stumbling over heaps of ruins, he came upon Shaw. The latter was seated before a broken pillar, notebook in one hand, sword in other; with the rapier he was scratching lichens from an inscription—the use to which he most often put the weapon. Dr. Shaw looked up excitedly.

"Patrick! Let me read you this remarkable inscription:

"Q. POMPEIO CN. F. QVIRIT. CLEMENTI
PA—DIIVR EX TESTAMENTO.
Q. POMPEIO F. QVIR. ROGATI FRATRIS SUI
POMPEIA A. P. MABRA POSVIT."

"Does that suggest nothing to you, Patrick? Does it betray no significance?"

Spence laughed. "Only that somebody wasted a lot of time. What's the big find, doctor?"

"Man, man! Do you not realize that this broken inscription refers to the grandson and great-grandson of Pompey himself? Finding them buried here beneath us, what a force and beauty are lent to the sublime epigram of Martial! Think of them being entombed here."

"I'm cold," said the practical Spence. "I'm thinking a lot more of ourselves than of Pompey's family. If you've finished copying those letters, suppose we move on."

"I forgot!"

The other rose.

"Patrick, I saw some men watching me from behind those stones—I said nothing of it, lest they interrupt before I had copied the words."

Spence stifled a curse.

"Come along, then! We've done enough talking—hello! Who's this?"

A swaggering figure approached them at this instant. It was Barbarroja, one hand at his hilt, the other twirling his mustaches. Beyond, Spence saw that Mistress Betty and the others were already mounting. Yimnah was lying down, drinking from the well.

"A word with you, *señores!*" exclaimed Barbarroja. "I have an offer to make you."

"Confound you!" snapped Spence. "What are you talking about?"

"Why, truce! Terms, capitulation, armistice! In a word, peace or war!"

"Are you mad?" demanded Dr. Shaw, peering at the renegade. Barbarroja chuckled.

"Not quite, *señor.* Listen! There is a company of men hidden here. At a call from me, they will attack. Now let us speak together—terms! My friend, who captains those hidden men, desires the person of the lady yonder. Now, how much is she worth to you? A word, and I can get you away from here without molestation."

"Villain!" cried Dr. Shaw, and hurled himself forward.

So unexpected was his attack, that Barbarroja was taken unawares. The amazed Spence saw his companion twine both hands in the flaming beard and jerk the ruffian forward. A wild howl of pain broke from the renegade, to be quenched in a groan as the lusty divine kicked him amidships and stretched him senseless on the stones.

"That's the way to deal with such gentry!" panted Shaw. "Now, to horse, Patrick!"

From the Spahis broke a shout of warning. A spattering of musket fire leaped from the hillside; men shouted, a ring of dark figures appeared, closing on the party. Spence and Dr. Shaw ran forward, trying to gain the horses.

"Ride, Shaw!" shouted Spence. "Ride with Mistress Betty and send aid! They've got us."

The ring of figures closed in upon them. Steel flashed in the moonlight.

CHAPTER VII.

"An honest fellow enough, and one that loves quails."

THE shots set the blooded, sensitive horses to plunging madly. One of the Spahis caught the bridle of Mistress Betty and spurred away with her; the other, his horse slain, leaped into the empty saddle of Barbarroja and galloped after his comrade.

Shaw was mounted, but two men were stabbing at him, a third had gripped his bridle rein. Yimnah was caught afoot. Spence missed his horse, which shied away; the two beasts were careering madly around, headed from the road and finding no outlet from the ruins.

Spence cut down the first man who sprang at him, and shouted again at the divine.

"Spur for it, Shaw! After her! Spur!"

"He who takes the sword," quoth the doctor, neatly putting his rapier through one of his assailants, "shall even perish by the same." And the thin blade split the throat of the man at his rein. "Farewell, Patrick! Woe is me that I must leave you."

His voice was lost as he thundered away.

Spence conjectured that a score of men must have fallen upon them. He himself was ringed in against a block of marble, which secured his back. He pistoled two of the men before him, seized his sword again, and they recoiled momentarily from his attack.

A wide blade flamed in the moonlight. The hoarse, inarticulate rage scream of Yimnah rent the night like a pæan of horror. The monstrous figure of the eunuch, streaming blood from a dozen wounds, rushed through the assailants, striking to right and left in blind fury. They opened before him, fell back from Spence, shrieked that this was no man, but some jinni of the mountains. Yimnah leaped on them, struck and struck again, screaming.

"Fools!" cracked out a voice in Spanish. A musket flashed near the voice. There died Yimnah, the wide blade sweeping out from his hand and clashing on the stones.

At this instant Spence leaped out suddenly as one of the horses plunged past: he caught the beast in mid-career, dragged himself into the high saddle. That harsh, crackling voice electrified him; it was the voice of Gholam Mahmoud. Now he perceived the man's figure, off to one side, and directed the plunging horse toward it.

"Assassin!" he shouted. "This time you shall not escape."

Another musket shot rang out. Spence felt a shock—and darkness came upon him. He bowed forward, his body supported by the huge Moorish saddle, his fingers twined into the mane of the horse. The frantic beast dashed away into the night with whirlwind hoofs.

Gholam Mahmoud leaped forward, raving like a maniac. To insure against discovery of the ambush, his horses had been left a quarter mile distant; pursuit was impossible. While Gholam Mahmoud cursed, Barbarroja came groaning to the scene, holding his hurt stomach.

"Ha, thou bitch wolf's fool!" cried the furious red-beard. "Why did you not await the signal?"

"You were too cursed long in giving it," snarled Gholam Mahmoud. "Now the woman is gone."

"A murrain on you and your woman!" shouted Barbarroja. "Now Spence is escaped, and Mulai Ali not come. Pot-head that you are—only one eunuch bagged, and half our men down!"

"Devil take you, get the horses and after them!"

"After them yourself," growled Barbarroja. "I stay here to kill Mulai Ali when he comes."

Ten minutes later Gholam Mahmoud rode away toward Udjde—alone.

When Patrick Spence came to his senses his horse was following a cattle track in a long and narrow valley. Where he was, Spence had not the least idea; he was completely lost. He had caught his own horse, and behind the saddle were provisions, water-skin, and the covered box belonging to Mulai Ali.

For a space he rode confusedly, until a twinge of pain recalled him to memory. He drew rein, found himself bareheaded, and discovered a slight wound along the scalp above his left ear. He made shift to wash the wound with water from his bottle.

"The devil!" he exclaimed suddenly. Realization smote him full force, left him appalled and bewildered. Why, Barbarroja must have been in league with Gholam Mahmoud all the time. He must have expected to lead Mulai Ali into that ambush; and, too, must have had some share in Gholam Mahmoud's work in Tlemcen.

"And I never suspected, when he found me trussed up and appeared so amazed," thought Spence, dumfounded. "Well, Master Red-beard, just wait a bit. I'll have a word with you in time."

Presumably, Shaw and the girl had escaped with the Spahis. They would reach Udjde and send help to Mulai Ali. Thus the assassins had gained nothing, and Spence considered his own case as he rode onward again.

He was lost, sure enough. So far as he could tell, he was among a series of long, barren hills; the valley stretched interminably, and seemed uninhabited, yet he knew that this cattle track must lead somewhere. He let the horse take its head.

The hours dragged until the moonlight was gone. Still Spence perceived no sign of life among the bare hills. With darkness, he halted, hobbled the horse, and lay down to sleep until dawn, hopeless of wandering on through the obscurity.

With dawn he found the horse muzzling him for food. Stiffly he gained his saddle and sent the Arab onward. As the sun rose to warm them, Spence noticed that the beast quickened its pace; ten minutes later he made out a low group of trees, and the dull walls of a mud-thatched building in an elbow of the valley.

Renewing the priming of his musket, he rode forward. Not until he drew near the trees and shouted did he discern any sign of life. Then a misshapen old man came forth from the hut and peered at him, chattering Arabic volubly.

"Do you speak Spanish?" demanded Spence. "Or English?"

The hunchback started, and drew back.

"Be you an Englishman, sir?" he quavered.

"Eh?" Spence started. "You're not?"

"God love ye, sir; God love ye!" broke out the ancient. "Out o' the stirrup and welcome to ye! It's two year and more since I've had a bit of English speech. A bonny bit o' flesh under ye, sir! God love ye, what a bonny creature it is."

"You're English?" said the astonished Spence, as he dismounted. "I need feed for the horse more than for myself."

"God love ye, an honest man thinks for his beastie first. Come in, and lead the horse after ye, sir. 'Tis like entertaining a prince to have a horse o' that blood under my roof! True Njed quarter strain, I'll warrant. Come in, sir, and welcome!"

Feeling as though in a dream, Spence entered the hut, a clean place, where the old man dwelt alone. A queer chap, this hunchback, with his wisps of gray hair, his tattered garb, his bleary old eyes and palsied hands.

His name, the man would not tell; but he chattered out his story. Indeed, his thought was all for the horse rather than for Spence. A cutpurse in Bristol, he had been jailed, taken into the navy with other criminals, and was aboard a sloop captured by Algerines. For thirty years he had been a slave. A natural liking for horses had made him the manager of an outlying herd of the animals which were bred hereabouts.

"Fifteen hands, and full o' the haunches," he mumbled, lovingly stroking the Arab's coat. "God love ye, didst ever see a finer slope o' the shoulder than this? And saddle-backed! Just the touch o' wiry springs, no weakness. What a head it is now, what a taper down from the brows! God love ye, sir, this beastie could drink from a pint pot and to spare! And the legs, twisted wi' sinew, but clean as a whistle, and the ear like a thorn—God love ye, this beastie must be out o' the bey's stables at Arzew! Not the dey himself has a horse o' Njed strain, but Hassan had two o' them. Ye bain't a slave on the escape, sir?"

Spence laughed.

"No. You're right about the horse, gran'ther; it's from the bey's stable."

He told briefly that he had been attacked by robbers at the Cisterns, and was lost. The ancient mumbled in amazement, but answered Spence's queries as to his road to Udjde.

"The Cisterns? God love ye, it's far away from here! Follow the vale and 'twill bring ye out on the river a few mile ahead. There ye'll find the river road from Udjde to the sea coast. Turn south to Udjde, or north to Adjerud, a tiny bit of a port that the Moors use.

"For a fine gentleman like you 'tis no journey at all! Sunset will see ye safe with lackeys and servants, and sojers, too, belike! God love ye, sir, 'tis no ride at all. Now wait ye here till I get some fresh tomatoes from the garden—"

The ancient shuffled away.

Within an hour Spence had breakfasted and mounted again. Spence forced money on the old man, and with a final "God love ye!" ringing in his ears, he rode away down the valley.

"A grotesque blessing, yet why not?" he reflected. "I've met worse hospitality in Christian lands. God rest you, old man, renegade or not!"

He saw no living creature on his way, though mile after mile slipped past. Udjde, he knew, was fifty miles from the coast. The "river road" was doubtless one that ran north to the port of Adjerud, for the maritime Moors were not fond of being cut off from the sea.

Shortly after noon Spence found that the valley was insensibly disappearing, and presently saw a river line of trees in the distance. In no long while he came to a wide but shallow stream, crossed it easily, and on the farther side found himself actually upon the road of which the old hunchback had told him.

He noted, too, a cloud of dust coming toward him from the north, betokening other riders on the road to Udjde. Since he had a straight story to tell and naught to fear, he waited, meaning to join them and ask protection as far as Udjde. He perceived that no caravan was approaching, but a group of horsemen, perhaps a detachment going to join the army.

Then, as he watched, the curiosity of Spence changed to incredulous amazement. Here were a score of horsemen, brilliantly garbed; and amid the foremost rode one clad in a plain white burnoose. Against this white burnoose, at the throat, was a glitter—there could be only one man in all the world with the effrontery to display the collar of the Golden Fleece against the garb of a renegade.

It was Ripperda beyond question. Ripperda, and with him his bodyguard of renegades—and riding to Udjde!

CHAPTER VIII.

"I'll learn to conjure and raise devils, but I'll see some issue of my spiteful execrations!"

DOCTOR SHAW did not regain control of his terrified horse until he pounded up alongside the two Spahis, who held between them the reins of Mistress Betty.

Vainly had she ordered them to return and fight, vainly threatened them, vainly entreating them, all but swearing at them in an agony of supplication. They, dour, bearded Turks, shrugged their shoulders and pricked westward. So when Shaw came up with the three, and the girl saw that he was alone, she turned upon him fiercely.

"Where is Captain Spence?"

"When I left he was still fighting."

The divine gave no explanation of his desertion.

"Oh!" cried the girl. "Oh—coward that you are, to leave him! Shame upon you!"

The Spahis grinned in the moonlight. They did not understand the words, but had no need to. Shaw, who still carried his naked rapier in his hand, wiped and sheathed it.

"My dear madam," he said, the cool stiffness of his voice giving no hint of the tears that were upon his cheeks, "Patrick Spence is very dear to me. But it is I who bear the letter to the Governor of Udjde. It is I who am charged with a commission involving the fate of empires and of religions—"

"And you save your craven neck for that reason!" burst forth the girl, bitterly.

"Even so, and it pleases you," rejoined Shaw's emotional voice. "Unless I reach

Udjde, our friend Mulai Ali falls into a trap laid yonder, and receives no aid. In this event Pasha Ripperda remains sole ruler of Morocco. In such case, the Barbary States combine against Spain, who will be alienated from her allies; and the Moors will begin a holy war for the reconquest of the peninsula. It is very logical that—"

"A murrain on your logic!" snapped Mistress Betty. "Patrick Spence is worth more than all your fine plans and schemes!"

"So speaks the woman, *mulier saeva*," reflected Dr. Shaw. "The cruel woman who recks empire less than the little finger of a man! Truly says Clemens Alexandrinus that—"

His voice ended, however, in a choked silence and a gulp. Here, perhaps, Mistress Betty perceived that in him was a greater tenderness than appeared, and guessed that his desertion of Spence might have other reason than cowardice or logic, for after this she rode on in silence.

They rode into Udjde in the morning with a great and haughty shouting on the part of the Spahis, and demands to see the amel immediately. Udjde, amid its wide orchards and olive groves, the most fertile oasis in all the Nagad steppe, opened itself to them by way of the Bab el Khemis.

Amid a continually growing concourse of horsemen, curious townfolk, and men of the famed Barbary tribes, they rode to the kasbah in the south quarter of the town. Thirty minutes later a hundred men of the ancient Lamta tribe were spurring madly eastward along the caravan road to the Cisterns.

Dr. Shaw found himself and Mistress Betty given commodious quarters in the citadel and hospitably entertained by the amel, or governor—an old, hoary Moor who had managed to live long by dint of guile and not too high ambitions.

During most of the day the worthy doctor rested. Toward evening he was summoned to dine with the governor, with word that news of Mulai Ali was expected at any time. Mistress Betty, being a woman, was forced to remain in her own apartment with the female slaves allotted her.

Garbed in clean linen, Shaw was conducted to the private quarters of the governor, whom he found alone. While a bountiful repast was served, the two fell to discussing affairs in Morocco. The governor was certain that once Mulai Ali could get into the country his star would quickly blaze above that of his cousin Abdallah.

"All men turn to the new master," he said sagely, stroking his white beard with his left hand, while his right plunged into the food. "El Magrib is ripe for revolt—but Abdallah is strong, and stronger yet is Ripperda, in whose hands is the power."

"If Mulai Ali comes will you declare for him?" asked Shaw.

"Yes, and my warriors will ride to Fez with him. Know you who that renegade was—him with the red beard, whom you called Barbarroja?"

Shaw shook his head. The old governor chuckled as at a good jest.

"He serves the Sherif Abdallah and carries with him the royal signet. And the other of whom you told me this morning, the man in the black burnoose, Ghelam Mahmoud, is the agent of Pasha Ripperda. He, he! No wonder those twain laid in ambush for Mulai Ali!"

Before Shaw could reply to this disclosure—indeed, for a moment he sat agape at hearing the truth about Barbarroja—a slave hurriedly entered and knelt. In his hands was a pigeon, which he presented to his master. Knowing that the force sent to the Cisterns had taken carrier pigeons, the quicker to inform the governor of what took place there, Shaw leaned forward anxiously as a tiny roll was taken from beneath the bird's wing.

The old Moor opened it, read a scrawl of Arabic, and turned pale.

"God, God, and God the Compassionate, the Merciful!" he ejaculated. "This is from a friend in Adjerud. It warns me that Pasha Ripperda is on his way here with his bodyguard of renegades. He should arrive to-morrow."

Shaw gave a start.

"Ripperda—with his bodyguard! No troops?".

The old Moor shook his head. He was extremely agitated; the very fact of Ripperda's coming had thrown him into consternation.

At this instant a second slave dashed in and presented a second bird. With trembling fingers the governor detached the missive. He read it, then crumpled the thin paper in his hand and sat staring before him, like a man who sees utter disaster ahead. In reality, his fertile old brain was scheming and planning, but Shaw did not know this.

"What is it?" demanded the divine eagerly. "News from Mulai Ali?"

For a long moment the Moor made no response. He stared straight before him, as though the question had been unheard. Shaw, unable to bear the suspense, reached out for the paper, but the Moor hastily tore it across.

"Catch Ripperda when he comes!" exclaimed Dr. Shaw swiftly. "You see your chance? Catch him at the city gates, capture him, raise the flag of Mulai Ali—"

The old Moor turned, lifted his head, regarded Shaw steadily.

"Ali," he said slowly, "is dead. The red-beard has done his work. The troops reached the place too late—Ali had been stricken by a bullet."

Shaw quivered under the blow. Then, silently, he resumed his seat and folded his hands on the table. Mulai Ali dead! Everything was lost. He did not observe that, while speaking, the eyelids of the Moor had fluttered slightly—an involuntary lowering of the lids, which is nature's signal of a lie issuing from the lips.

Swiftly the governor clapped his hands. A slave brought writing materials, and the old Moor dashed off several notes, which he sealed and dispatched. Then the captain of the troops, a splendid Berber of the hills, strode in and received rapid orders.

"The Pasha Ripperda arrives to-morrow. Prepare rooms in the citadel for his use. In the name of Allah, greet him as one who is the right hand of our lord the sherif!"

Again the two men were alone. The old governor turned to Shaw with a quiet gesture.

"You have eaten my salt. I cannot protect you against Ripperda. What wish you to do?"

Dr. Shaw had gathered his wits by this time, and his brain was working shrewdly.

"My friend Spence was not mentioned in that message? Then let us hope that he is alive. I shall remain here. Ripperda will not harm us, for I have a nominal errand to the sherif—regardless of his name! And I must await news of my friend, also. We shall remain here."

The Moor nodded. His eyes were narrowed in calculation, anxiety sat beneath the lids.

"May Allah further your undertakings! I have my own head to look after."

Dr. Shaw took the hint, rose, and departed to tell Mistress Betty his news.

In another portion of this town was a house, outwardly inconspicuous, inwardly a mass of sumptuous furnishings. Many slaves were here, white and black; the harem was large.

In a small room sat the master of this house, upon a thick rug before a writing table such as scribes use. A tiny shaded lamp burned before him; his face was invisible, only his sinewy arms showing in the circle of light. He clapped his hands, and a slave entered.

"When a man comes showing the signet of the sherif, bring him to me at once."

Alone again, the man went on writing. As his right arm moved in the light, one could see a design upon the skin—the figure of a dolphin, tattooed there. This man was Gholam Mahmoud.

Suddenly, almost without a sound, the door opened. A man clad in a dark burnoose came into the room; he threw back the hood and disclosed the flaming beard of Barbarroja. A weary oath broke from him as he sank down on the rug.

"Diantre! Get me some wine. I had to shout for half an hour before they would open the city gates—even the signet of the sherif barely satisfied the dogs. Allah upon them! I rode my horse to death and walked the last two miles of the way here."

A slave brought wine. Barbarroja twice drained a goblet, then sighed contentedly.

"You should have stayed with me." He grinned at his host. "You lost money, caballero! That is what comes of running after women. As it is, the reward is mine."

"Reward!" Gholam Mahmoud started. "Then—Mulai Ali—"

"Is dead."

Barbarroja twirled his mustache grandly.

"I do not say it was well done, nor am I proud of the matter; however, Allah knows I need the money! His Spahis fought off my men, and while they fought, I gained place in the rear—and put a bullet in his back."

"Where is his head, then?" sneered the other.

"Bah! The event will prove my words. Any news of the man Spence?"

"None. He is lost. The others reached here safely. Why are you interested in him?"

"Because," said Barbarroja coolly, "I have just learned that Spence carries the leather box behind his saddle. That makes you jump, eh? Well, it is the truth. Ripperda's casket!"

Gholam Mahmoud snapped out an oath. Then: "Have you any scheme, any way to find him?"

Barbarroja chuckled.

"Spence cannot go far alone, and dare not go back to Tlemcen; so he must come west. In that event, he will be picked up somewhere in this district. We have only to wait until he is brought to the governor. When he comes we take the casket—and you negotiate its sale to your master Ripperda. You comprehend? It is simple."

Gholam Mahmoud smiled his twisted smile.

"And suppose Pasha Ripperda comes here?"

"Let him come!" Barbarroja shrugged, but his eye was startled. "Do you expect him?"

"Perhaps to-night; certainly to-morrow."

"*Dios!* Very well."

The Spaniard made a grandiloquent gesture.

"I am a generous man. I shall allow you to share the credit of killing Mulai Ali; tell the pasha we did it together. The sherif's reward goes to me, however. This will rehabilitate your credit with Ripperda, who will then gladly pay a big sum for the casket. You understand?"

Gholam Mahmoud regarded him sneeringly for a moment.

"I understand that in all this there is no mention of the woman whom I desire. If we are to work together, let the conditions be fulfilled—or I shall obtain the woman for myself! If you want the money, turn over the woman to me, and do it quickly. She is here now."

Barbarroja pawed at his great beard, and considered this demand.

"Agreed," he said, and yawned. "You shall have her to-morrow. Give me a place to sleep, caballero, and Allah will bring all things to pass!"

Gholam Mahmoud himself conducted his guest to a room on the upper floor.

Once alone, Barbarroja did not sleep, though he was worn and haggard. Instead he sat for a while staring into the lantern, and plucking at his huge beard. He was sore put to it.

"They will all be warned against me now, since that old goat of a governor knows me all too well," he reflected. "And the governor will avenge the death of Mulai Ali on me, if he catches me. How, then, shall I get the woman for yonder lecherous viper? Get her I must!

"If that devil of a Spence returns—ha! Old Shaw is the one to work upon; and I owe him a turn for the sorry trick he played me at the Cisterns. Shaw is the one—and it must be done speedily, before Ripperda comes; before that devil Spence turns up! To-morrow, early."

He sat for a while longer, then blew out the lantern. Presently his chuckles died away into a droning snore.

CHAPTER IX.

"Sword is an oath, and oaths must have their course."

AN hour after sunrise, Dr. Shaw hastily sought the presence of the governor.

"Sleep is a trusty adviser," he said. "I have changed my mind overnight, and have decided to leave here at once, before Ripperda shall arrive."

"God knoweth all things." The old Moor blinked. "Consider me at your command. What wish you?"

"Nothing," said Shaw. "I will take the two Spahis who brought me here and go on

to Fez. I have obtained a guide. Give me a spare horse, food, and water-skins."

The old Moor blinked again. He smelled something amiss, since this was not the proper state for an envoy. But he was mightily glad to be rid of Shaw, who might interfere with his own artistic lies to Ripperda, and refused to inquire too close into Shaw's purpose.

Nor did he fail to note the inward agitation of Shaw. Putting one thing with another, he shrewdly guessed that this agitation was connected with the missing Spence. All his solicitude was for his own hoary head, however, so he sped his guests right courteously.

Half an hour later Dr. Shaw and Mistress Betty, attended by the two Spahis, rode toward the western gate of the city. With Shaw, in front, was a rascally one-eyed Moor. He was not only the guide, but the cause of their precipitate departure.

"You are certain you know the place?" said Dr. Shaw to the Moor.

"Aye, infidel," growled the guide. "It is the tomb of Osman, half a mile from the city gates—a deserted spot, since the tomb has fallen into ruin."

Shaw drew back beside the girl, who watched him with anxious eyes.

"I think it is all right," he said. "At least, it tallies with Spence's note, and we must trust the rascal. Let me study that note again, mistress."

The girl handed him a paper, which he read over as he rode. It was a note in English, signed by Spence, telling Shaw to meet him outside the western gate at the tomb of Osman, and to make no delay. Spence stated that he was slightly wounded, had no horse, and dared not enter the city; that Mulai Ali was dead, and all their hopes gone. All this tallied only too well with what Shaw himself knew.

As they neared the western gate, there came to them a distant sound of gunfire and a faint clamor of shouts. Shaw gave the girl a whimsical smile. This noise was the welcome to Ripperda, who was at that moment entering the city by the northern gate.

The gate behind them, the party rode toward the orchards and groves beyond the city. The Spahis were ahead, the guide between them; Shaw and Mistress Betty followed with the lead horse. In this order they entered the rich champaign and saw the city walls vanish.

The timeliness of this departure, and the expected meeting with Spence, put Dr. Shaw into high good humor. His anxieties disappeared, and he discussed with the girl whether they should strike on for Fez or return to Algiers. In the midst of this cogitation the guide called back to inform him that the tomb of Osman lay ahead.

This was the ruined tomb of some ancient marabout, as the domed building testified. A desolate garden surrounded the place, which was in ruinous disrepair. There was no sign of Spence to be seen, and Shaw strove to dissipate the uneasiness of his companion.

"He may be sleeping somewhere near by," he said, reassuringly. "At least, we can wait."

They drew near, and passed beneath the western wall of the old tomb, where there was shade from the morning sunlight. Shaw dismounted and gave his hand to the girl to help her from the saddle.

At this instant the trap was sprung.

The guide, with one lightning movement, plunged his long knife into the side of the nearest Spahi, then put spurs to his horse. The second Spahi whipped out his scimitar, and from the near-by trees came a ragged blast of muskets. Pierced by two bullets, the Spahi fell beside his dying comrade.

Three men came running from the trees, joining the treacherous guide.

So swiftly had all this taken place that both Shaw and the girl stood motionless, paralyzed by the rapid horror. Then, as the assassins ran forward, a cry broke from Shaw.

"Barbarroja!"

Red-beard it was, brandishing his sword, who led the other ruffians. He came to a halt and grinned widely at Shaw, while his men seized the horses and plundered the dead Spahis.

"*Señor*, I greet you! Behold, am I not a pretty writer of notes? It is not Spence."

"Scoundrel!" cried the doctor in a strangled voice. "You have deceived us!"

"Decoyed you into a pretty trap—exactly!" Barbarroja flourished his sword. "But there is no credit in decoying a weak partridge like you, little man."

One glance around showed Dr. Shaw that he was lost. He instantly became calm and cold.

"What is the reason for this treachery?" he demanded, hand on sword.

"It is twofold," was the cool response. "The pretty señorita would be reason enough for most men; but honor comes first with me. I owe you a debt for what you did to me at the Cisterns, and I shall settle the debt."

Barbarroja advanced, glaring at Shaw. Behind the latter stood Mistress Betty, motionless, watching and listening in utter despair.

"Oh, traitorous rascal!" groaned Shaw. "It is all your doing that—"

"My doing, indeed!" Barbarroja strutted with huge gusto. "Poor little chicken of a man. Was not I, Lazaro de Polan, sent to kill Mulai Ali? Well, he is dead as yonder marabout! And you are in my power, and my friend Gholam Mahmoud will take the leather box when Spence shows up, as he must soon do!"

He laughed at the despair of Shaw. It was a proud moment for Barbarroja, whose vanity was the greatest part of him. He stood there and laughed, while that great flaming beard of his curled and matted over his chest. Already Barbarroja was a little drunk with the prowess of his arm and his wits. His three ruffians watched him in proper awe.

"Now to our debt, little man," he went on. "You insulted me both in Christian and Moslem fashion. You kicked me, for which the ancestry of Lazaro de Polan demands recompense; and you tweaked my beard, for which the ancestry of Barbarroja demands vengeance. To what end have I, a great caballero, entered the portals of Islam, if I am not to enjoy the rights of that faith? So, as a caballero of Toledo, and a devout Moslem, I demand satisfaction!"

Shaw uttered a hollow laugh.

"You would murder me, you scurvy rogue?"

"Not at all," said Barbarroja grandly. "I, Lazaro de Polan, am no slaughterer of poor fools! In my capacity as a good Moslem, I should at once put steel into you; but in my capacity as a good caballero, I do not desire to sully my sword. Look at this sword, little man! Look at the spring of it! A true Toledo blade out of the sherif's treasury!"

He seized the long blade, bent it double, let it spring back again. Passion seized upon Shaw—the angry passion of one to whom all hope is lost.

"Vile renegade!" he spat out bitterly. "If you have the courage to face me, do so! Dog that you are, I suppose you will have your bandits pistol me in the back!"

A look of astonished fury swept into Barbarroja's face. He stared at Shaw, then swung and faced his men. At an order from him, they retired. He turned again to Shaw.

"For those words, I kill you!" He threw away his hat, bowed mockingly. "In my capacity as a caballero of Toledo, I salute you! To you is the honor of crossing blades with Lazaro."

Shaw, swift as light, lunged forward.

The rapiers touched, clashed, hung suspended; they ground against each other, steel against steel, wrist against wrist. With his free hand, Barbarroja carelessly twirled his mustache. Shaw disengaged and lunged again. Once more the steel slithered and twined and hung futile against the sky.

"Not bad, Englishman!" observed Barbarroja patronizingly. "Not bad! Come, thrust the point into this red beard of mine—thrust in the point! I recall a Frenchman who had learned the Italian blade and who fancied himself greatly, back at Ceuta."

Shaw attacked furiously, a silent deadliness in his manner. Barbarroja parried the attack, laughing, and continued his careless speech.

"He was a clever Frenchman! He had a thrust not unlike yours, a stiff and upright godliness in his wrist. When I warned him against this red beard, he laughed, and had the audacity to thrust straight into it. And what then? Why—"

A curse fell from Shaw's lips. Not even

a doctor of divinity but is human; and for one flickering instant the point of Barbarroja had licked at his throat. He parried, lunged again, pressed the attack with a colder skill, a more supple wrist. Barbaroja escaped only by a backward leap, disengaging. Shaw was upon him instantly. Again the thin blades met and twined, and hung suspended with life wavering in the balance.

"We were speaking of that Frenchman," pursued Barbarroja, again twirling his red mustache. "He thought I jested, even as you think, little *señor!* And the point in my red beard—*Dios!* Have a care with that riposte—the point was tangled in my beard, *señor*, and my own point pricked him very neatly in the throat—thus—"

Barbarroja laughed very heartily; and midway of the laugh lunged like a demon.

In and out flickered his blade, a very tongue of death, and his eyes glared in sudden hot ferocity for blood. Shaw evaded that licking tongue by a hair; it reached around him, baffled him, bore him desperately backward.

He fought only by inspiration, his eyes upon the blazing stare of Barbarroja, his blade fending off the slithering death by sheer intuition. This could not last long, and Shaw knew it.

He was driven back and back, while ever those blood-hot eyes glared upon him, and the Toledo slid ever with more deadly lust. Now he was growing weary.

Abruptly Shaw gathered himself together, so abruptly that in the very midst of his retreat he plunged forward. The two blades went upward, locked at the hilts; then Shaw thrust back and forward again, leaped away, stood on guard. It was all in a flash.

Barbarroja moved not. He stared at Shaw with an expression of dismayed consternation. Then, unexpectedly, the Toledo dropped from his hand. Across his breast surged a sudden wide flare of crimson. His knees crumpled; he plunged forward on his face and lay quiet.

"Whether he died from the point," murmured Shaw, panting, "or from sheer amazement that I pinked him—'tis all one. The result, logically enough."

From the three ruffians came a wild, hoarse yell—a shout of mingled rage, despair, and fright. They broke and ran for the horses. With a rush, a scramble, a flood of hot oaths, they mounted and took to flight. Dr. Shaw gazed after them, wide-eyed. Then he felt the hand of Mistress Betty seize his arm—heard her voice crying out at him:

"Look! Look—it is he—Spence!"

Shaw whirled about. There, upon the road, he beheld a cloud of dust, and far ahead of the dust three riders already drawing close—the foremost of them Spence.

An instant later Spence was reining up beside them, while his men whirled on in pursuit of the three escaping rogues.

"Good!" cried Spence, exultantly shaking hands. "The old governor scented something amiss in your departure — he said I might catch up with you, so I came along. Shaw, what's been going on here? Why did you leave town, Mistress Betty?"

There was a moment of hurried explanations as all spoke at once. Then the girl seized upon the story, and Spence heard of what had taken place. Soberly he nodded at mention of Mulai Ali's death.

"Aye, we heard of his death—Ripperda was carried off his feet with delight. He is a gracious scoundrel, that Ripperda! Hello, Shaw, what are you up to?"

They turned. Dr. Shaw was muttering over the Toledo, which he had picked up. Now he lifted his face to them, his eyes gleaming with delight.

"Look!" he cried. "The rascal told the truth! This graving says that the blade was made at Toledo, in the year 368 of the Moslem calendar, by special order of the great Almansur of Cordova! To think of such a sweet tool—a historic relic—eight hundred years of age."

"Thrust it into your scabbard and let us be gone—with congratulations on your victory, doctor! A noble fight. But Ripperda is awaiting you, and so keep your wits about you."

Shaw stared with fallen jaw. Ripperda!

"Then look to yourself, Patrick!" he cried suddenly. "This Barbarroja told me that it is known you carry the casket be-

hind your saddle! Gholam Mahmoud knows it."

Spence broke into another hearty laugh.

"Nay, let him search!" he cried gayly. "When I met with Ripperda, yesterday, I threw the box into the river. The box is gone, Mulai Ali is dead—there is an end to all intrigue! Here come three horsemen who rode with me."

The horsemen, among whom were some of Ripperda's bodyguard, were returning. At the saddle of the three foremost were three bloody heads. Steel, says the proverb, is swifter than judgment.

Thus the three, reunited, rode back into Udjde. If Patrick Spence thought that he was done with intrigue, however, he was far wrong, for Mulai Ali, though wounded and hidden away by the old governor, was not dead at all.

CHAPTER X.

"He will spend his mouth and promise, like Brabbler the hound; but when he performs, astronomers foretell it!"

PASHA RIPPERDA sat in the justice hall of the kasbah and enjoyed his triumph. With the death of Mulai Ali, the one external danger that menaced him was gone. This thin man with the haunted eye was the supreme ruler of western Africa; the combined Barbary armies and fleets obeyed his orders—Egypt was in alliance with him.

Inwardly, gout rioted in his blood. As he sat and gave orders and heard reports, agony twisted him. Around him were his famous renegades, bitter, cruel men, devoted to him. And they could not save him from the devils that dwelt in his blood.

Messengers were dispatched to the sherif with news of Mulai Ali's death—though the body had not been found—and Ripperda ordered a litter made ready that night, for he was returning swiftly to the army.

Dr. Shaw, Patrick Spence, and Mistress Betty entered the hall.

Though the effort made his face livid, Ripperda arose and tendered the girl the pitiful ghost of that bow whose courtly grace had once been famous from Vienna to Madrid. Then he sank back and fell back among the cushions.

In the eyes of the girl lay pity. Dr. Shaw, after one cold bow, stood gazing at the man with no evidence of feeling. The shrewd doctor was sensible that he faced an enemy.

Ripperda began to speak in English, and suddenly the inner man shone forth. That tongue of Ripperda's had done incredible feats, and had not lost its cunning. He ignored Shaw for the moment and addressed the girl, whose story he had learned from Spence on the road.

"You have naught to fear under my protection, mistress," he concluded with that wan and haunted smile of his. "I shall take you to the coast and place you aboard the first Christian ship available; I have promised the same to Captain Spence. And, lady, I have heard much regarding your skill with the stars. I would talk with you later in the day regarding these augurs of destiny. This gentleman, I take it, is the famous Dr. Shaw, of Algiers?"

Shaw bowed again, assenting dryly. Ripperda eyed him, smiled, assumed a blunt frankness.

"What say you—shall we consign the past to oblivion, sir? I know in whose company you have journeyed; but as our Spanish proverb says, 'The dead have no friends.' How say you?"

Shaw chuckled.

"It is also said that a living dog is better than a dead lion. I pay you my compliments for your generosity, admit my culpability, and pray your grace."

Ripperda, generous enough in victory, uttered a frank laugh.

"Greatness knows how to punish and how to forgive. I pardon you and welcome you, for your erudition is famed. I pray that you will join me for the noon meal; meantime, your late quarters are again at your disposal."

With a brief bow Shaw accepted the dismissal. The three were conducted to the quarters so recently vacated, and there, with the girl's permission, the two men lighted pipes and talked. Spence told what had happened to him, and how he had flung the

leather box into the river and joined Ripperda.

"Ripperda was friendly enough," he concluded. "He knew all about our friendship with Mulai Ali, bore no grudge, and welcomed me. A most amazing man!"

"Very!" said Shaw dryly. "Before Ceuta, he had two Spanish spies impaled on the same stake one day which amazed even the Moors! Mistake not, Patrick; we play with fire."

Spence shrugged.

"Mistress Betty," he said, "your predictions to Mulai Ali scarce jibe with the fate that had befallen him! How explain you this discrepancy?"

"I explain nothing, Mr. Spence," she said. "I am more interested in knowing what is to become of us. Will Ripperda keep his promises, think you?"

"He takes us to the coast to-night," answered Spence. "Yes, it—it—"

As he spoke he had glanced through the window, which overlooked the courtyard. His voice died away. Suddenly he turned, darted to the door, flung it open. In the doorway stood one of Ripperda's bodyguard, pistol on arm. The man, a Frenchman, did not budge.

"No one is permitted to leave," he said, and grinned. "By order of the pasha."

Spence slammed the door again. "Down there—Gholam Mahmoud, talking with the soldiers! The presence of that man bodes us ill."

Dr. Shaw started.

"The man in black—Ripperda's confidential agent! H-m! I see it all now. He has heard of Barbarroja's death. He is down there, questioning the renegades, looking for that leather box—ha, Patrick! Did Ripperda's men see you throw the box in the river?"

"Aye, most likely." Spence stood at the window, watching the ominous figure below. "They said naught of it, however. Perchance they saw it done."

A hammering at the door. Spence opened to admit a hulking Dutchman, the leader of Ripperda's bodyguard. He made a smirking bow.

"The pasha wishes to see the lady and talk about the stars."

Mistress Betty rose, calm and self-contained. She looked at Spence, and smiled.

"Do not fear for me, friends, for I think that Ripperda will keep his promise, and I may be able to help you. Farewell for the present!"

She left the room, the two men looking after her, helpless. Of those twain, one was destined to see her no more in life.

Mistress Betty entered the hall of justice, but was detained at the door. A tall figure in black passed her and strode rapidly to the side of Ripperda, to whom he spoke, low-voiced.

"Spence tried to destroy it, but I can recover it in a day or two. If I succeed will you give me this English girl for my harem?"

Ripperda's face was overspread with a mortal pallor from the anguish in his veins.

"Her and a dozen more like her," he said hoarsely. "A million curses on that Spence! Go, and fail me not. I shall await your report at Adjerud. The girl belongs to you."

Gholam Mahmoud circled the seat and vanished through a hidden door. Mistress Betty was brought forward, curtsied, and waited. Ripperda forced a mechanical smile to his lips.

"Mistress, plead not for your companions!" he said gently. "They have deceived me basely—"

"They are my friends," said the girl. "I cannot but ask your clemency for Mr. Spence and—"

Ripperda made a hasty, maddened gesture. His eyes flamed savagely.

"Very well, very well! Spence shall live; I will carry him to Adjerud and sell him as a slave. But Shaw—say no word of him, I warn you. Oh, how that man smiled at me! And in his heart he knew the box was gone, that I was defeated, unable to keep my promises—"

A spasm of rage came upon him. He writhed among his cushions, then with an effort got himself in hand.

"My horoscope!" he exclaimed. "Cast it. Fear not, gentle lady; you are under my protection and shall go safe to England. You have the word of Ripperda. So, while we journey north, do you cast my horo-

scope, for I think you will tell the truth about things."

So the man lied. Mistress Betty, sensing the lie from his very protests, went a shade whiter. There was no fear in her answer, however.

"My lord, I am no wizard. To diagram the stars aright cannot be done in an hour or a day; I have no books to help me. Give me certain information, and in a week it shall be done."

"A week!" repeated Ripperda. "Well, have your way. I shall have two women slaves given you, and new quarters here. We leave an hour before the sunset prayer. I shall send a scribe to you at once; let him write down what information you desire for the horoscope, and I will send it to you in an hour. Until night, rest, for we must travel fast."

So Mistress Betty went to her prison, and saw her friends no more.

An hour before sunset Ripperda and his cavalcade departed. In the courtyard was riding and mounting; a horse litter was ready for Ripperda, another for Mistress Betty. Spence and Dr. Shaw, disarmed and bound, were dragged forth beside Ripperda's litter. From his curtained cushions, Ripperda glared out like some venomous reptile at Shaw.

"Smile on, fool!" said Ripperda acidly. "When the stake has pierced into your vitals and death is red before your eyes, remember Ripperda. Ho, there, amel!"

The old governor came forward obsequiously. Ripperda pointed to Dr. Shaw.

"When the muezzin cries for morning prayer, set this man upon a stake at the western gate. When he is dead, send his head to me in salt, that I may see whether he still smiled in death. Place the other [illegible]

[illegible] him pierced the voice of Shaw.

"Farewell, Patrick! God watch over you."

"And you," returned Spence in a choked voice. He looked back once, but Shaw had already been dragged away.

Through the city street, to the north gate, and then out in the sweet sunset through the olive groves and the fields of green alfalfa, passed the cavalcade, and on to the winding road that led north over the horizon to the sea. The sea! How the thought of it pierced Spence at this moment!

Himself tightly bound, destined to slavery; poor Shaw, impaled at the gate of Udjde; Mistress Betty, clenched in the grip of Ripperda and trusting to his treacherous word; and all these in the turn of a single day!

"A long score, Gholam Mahmoud," muttered Spence thickly. "This is your doing, somehow—a long score to settle—"

So the sun sank from sight, and the day was done.

CHAPTER XI.

"Fortuna—transmutat incertos honores."

THE little town of Adjerud, at the mouth of the Tafna River, was enjoying a brief heyday of prosperity. Upon an eminence behind the village was camped the great Pasha Ripperda with his personal troops; he kept the roads busy with messengers to the camps at Oran in the east and Ceuta in the west. He had been here a week, and illness held him fast.

Below the village, and by the deposition of fate camped between Ripperda and the shore, were a thousand wild Berber horsemen, come from Morocco to join the armies. Ripperda was holding them here, uncertain as yet where they were most needed.

In the tiny port lay two ships. One was a small brigantine of Tetuan, Ripperda's personal ship, manned by renegades like himself. On this ship, said rumor, were kept great treasures: Pasha Ripperda never knew when he was to be sent a-wandering once more. The other ship was a battered hulk, brought in by a Salee rover to be repaired. Great crowds thronged the beach to watch her. She had come from a far country, and under her stem were the strange words, "Boston Lass."

Aboard her were a score or more infidel captives hard at work. Each night they were brought ashore and kept guarded in a fishing shed on the beach. Among them was Patrick Spence, turned over to the

fate of a slave, working under the lash with his fellow American seamen.

In a separate tent adjoining that of Ripperda remained Mistress Betty and her two slave women. She was closely guarded, for her own sake; when she left the tent, it was usually at night. From her women she knew of Spence's fate, and knew that her own would be no better.

Upon the evening of Friday, "the day of the congregation," she was summoned to the tent of Ripperda. He sat propped among pillows, his swathed feet upon two stools. His harried features bore such a blaze of exultation that she knew instantly some great thing had happened. Messengers had come from Oran by land, and from Ceuta by sea.

"Good evening, lady," said Ripperda courteously. "Is not the horoscope finished?"

"At this time to-morrow night I will present it to you," responded the girl quietly.

"Ah! And does it tell of success or failure?"

"Only one failure have I seen so far, my lord, and that is death. But there are evil influences in the south, and I fear to-morrow may tell another story."

"Know you what has chanced to-day?" Ripperda gave a vibrant laugh. "Hear, then! The fleet and army of Algiers have joined my forces before Oran. A victory has been won at Ceuta. The Sultan of Egypt has joined me. And last—read this, which just came from Oran, from the hand of Admiral Perez himself!"

He extended a paper, a letter in Spanish. The girl read:

> I write you hastily, during battle. The enemy attacked us and are trapped. Before me are the heads of the governor general, Marquis de Santa Cruz; the Marquis de Valdecagnas, Colonel Pinel, and a hundred officers of the Walloon and other regiments. In the name of Allah, who gives victory.
>
> Thy friend,
>
> PEREZ.

"Now," cried Ripperda proudly, "let us see if your horoscope forecasts what must happen! The Spaniard driven from Africa—and what then? Finish your labors, fair lady!"

"To-morrow night they shall be finished, my lord. And forget not your promise to me!"

"I renew the promise—you shall have one of the captured Spanish ships at Oran, to go whither you will!"

The girl left the tent trembling, for she feared the man and his purposes. For a space she stood gazing over the camp-crowded shore below, and the little bay where the ship lights glimmered. Sadness was upon her, the load of despair grew more hopeless each hour. All her hopes had crashed down.

Now she was aware that a dark-clad Moor approached the man who guarded her. They talked softly, there was the chink of money, then the Moor came forward and addressed her in Spanish:

"*Señorita*, I come from Udjde. I have a letter for you, another for Captain Spence."

Mistress Betty started violently. She took the paper extended to her.

"He is among the slaves yonder," she said, despairing. "You cannot reach him."

The Moor laughed quietly.

"Aye, we knew that ere I left. My master, the governor, has word daily by pigeon. I am told to bid you hope, and despair not. Adios!"

Crushing the note in her hand the girl turned to her own tent. In a fever of eagerness, she dismissed her slaves and bent above the lamp. She opened the paper and read:

> If this reaches you, know that Mulai Ali is alive and well and will be proclaimed sherif ere this reaches you. Make what use of the news you can—he is already marching on Fez, but we keep it secret. The bearer will rescue you and Spence, if possible, and bears full powers from Mulai Ali to act for him. God keep you, sweet mistress!
>
> THOS. SHAW.

Tears brimmed the girl's eyes. Rescue! Good Dr. Shaw alive and well. Mulai Ali alive!

Whether she could be plucked from Ripperda's hand was a large query. Spence was another matter: she felt sure that Mulai Ali's emissary would rescue him. That Moor must have many friends, men of Ali's

party, enemies of the pasha. Was Shaw preparing some deadly blow against Ripperda, here in this place? Undoubtedly!

Exultation burned in the girl's eyes as she turned to the horoscope.

"Mulai Ali wins!" she murmured, her eyes wide in rapt thought. "Though Ripperda slay me for it I shall drive home one blow to his face—such a blow as he shall rue bitterly! The man means to play me false, break his promise; I read it in his eyes. Well, then, here is a weapon that shall strike home to him!"

She seized quill and ink horn, and fell to work.

The following day was quiet. Ripperda looked hourly for fresh dispatches from Oran, but none came. His gout was worse; in her tent, Mistress Betty could hear the deep groans from his quarters. Only his renegades were encamped here on the hill, for he would trust no others.

Late in the afternoon, from her tent, the girl saw the arrival of a dozen horsemen from the south. Their leader wore a black burnoose, and at sight of him the girl shrank. Gholam Mahmoud! What new evil did his presence foretell? Had the man come to warn Ripperda?

The girl's fears might have been both lightened and increased had she followed Gholam Mahmoud into Ripperda's tent. He swaggered in, saluted Ripperda, and laid down a bundle.

"You have it there?" Ripperda started up, eagerly.

"Aye," said Gholam Mahmoud. "As I thought, Captain Spence flung it into the river. Well, here it is! Being sewn in canvas, it has probably suffered little damage. It is unopened."

Ripperda seized on the bundle with trembling fingers, ripped away the canvas, took a knife and cut the stiffened leather around the lock. Opening the box he found a number of small packages wrapped in oiled silk. A long breath of relief came from him, and he relaxed amid his cushions. Gholam Mahmoud regarded him with sardonic gaze.

"And my reward?"

"Ah!" Ripperda started. "Wait until to-night. The girl is casting my horoscope. Remain, hear the reading of it—and take her. Are you content?"

"It is well, master. I shall go and rest until night."

The heel of the afternoon passed into sunset. As the daylight waned, the sail of a fast little sloop was seen speeding up the harbor toward the village.

It was now that Ripperda sent for Mistress Betty.

Starry-eyed she entered the tent, holding against the bosom of her white robe the scroll which was to foretell the doom of Pasha Ripperda. He sat among the cushions, smiling that weary smile of his. To one side sat Gholam Mahmoud, puffing at a water pipe; save for them, and the guard at the door, the pavilion was empty.

"The labor is done?" Ripperda's tone was silky. "And did you obey my request?"

"I did," said the girl. "My lord, your entire fate is written here."

"Then read it, read it!" Ripperda's interest quickened. "Tell first of the things I most want to know—the issue of my undertakings! I can study the whole horoscope later. Does everything go well?"

"Not so, my lord."

The girl's tone was grave; the gaze that she bent upon Ripperda was steady.

"If you desire flattery, I might give it; but what I have written here is the truth."

Ripperda leaned back, a dry smile upon his lips.

"Let us know the worst, mistress! When shall the infidel be driven from Africa?"

"Never." Mistress Betty unrolled the paper and read. "Your star has waned, my lord. The war against Spain is doomed to failure—nay, has already failed! Mulai Ali is alive and has been proclaimed sherif. You yourself have not a fortnight longer to enjoy life—"

An oath ripped from pasha's lips. He sat upright, fury in his eyes.

"What madness is this?" he cried out. "Why, this—"

A cry from the door; into the pavilion rushed a panting man, waving a paper. The guard at the door called in to Ripperda.

"A boat from Oran, lord! This message has just come! From the admiral!"

Ripperda seized the paper, tore at the seals. Within, he found only a few hasty lines:

> Allah has turned victory into defeat. The Algerine fleet is crushed on the rocks. Our camp is taken. Our army is shattered. Pasha Ali is dead. Flee to Tetuan; I meet you there. All is lost.
>
> PEREZ.

From Ripperda burst a hollow groan. His features became ghastly, and for a moment he sat as though paralyzed. The paper fell from his nerveless fingers; Gholam Mahmoud, leaning forward, read the message in silence.

In this dread silence came another cry from the guard at the door.

"A courier from the south, with urgent news!"

"Admit him," said Ripperda in a dead voice.

"In the name of God!" cried the dust-white man, flinging himself on his face at the entrance. "Mulai Ali is not dead, but alive, has been proclaimed sherif, is marching on Fez with all the Zenete tribes behind him. Also, an hour ago I met two Spahis from the army at Ceuta, who told me that the infidels have raised the siege there, and that a great fleet of Spanish ships has passed on the way to Oran—"

From Ripperda broke one choking cry. He rose, swayed, his face purpled with a rush of blood. Guards rushed into the tent, caught him in their arms. He could utter only one terrible word—

"Tetuan!" he gasped, and again: "Tetuan!"

He fell forward in their arms. Well, they knew that it was the signal to flee with him to his one refuge—Tetuan, on the coast. The captain of the bodyguard came running in hastily.

"There is mad tumult in the camp—by Allah! What has happened here?"

"Disaster," said Gholam Mahmoud coolly. "The armies at Oran and Ceuta destroyed, Mulai Ali alive and proclaimed sherif! The master says to flee to Tetuan at once. Take the ship."

"Listen!" shouted a renegade from the doorway. "Listen!"

From the camp below came rising a great chorus of voices, while muskets banged. "*Ras Ripperda!*" clamored a shrill, deadly yell, and the name of Mulai Ali rose high.

"They'll have his head, sure enough." Gholam Mahmoud gestured toward the unconscious Ripperda. "Get him away! You are cut off from the ship; you can't gain it now. To horse!"

"By Allah, that is the truth!" cried the captain of the guard. "We cannot reach the shore. Bring him out, comrades—to horse, to horse!"

A rush of excited men. The tent emptied, save for the girl shrinking to one side—and Gholam Mahmoud. The latter brought a whistle to his lips, blew a shrill blast. The next moment a dozen men—his own men—were crowding into the pavilion. A mad tumult was rolling up from the camp.

"Loot everything!" cried Gholam Mahmoud. "Get aboard Ripperda's ship—take her and her treasures for ourselves. Quickly! Scatter and meet at the shore!"

He turned upon Mistress Betty. One cry broke from her, but too late. A shawl was about her head, and he lifted her in his arms.

A moment afterward the rush of maddened Berbers, yelling the name of Mulai Ali and shrieking for the head of Ripperda, burst over the group of tents. These were empty. Only a hard-riding group of horsemen under the starlight showed that some few men had been faithful to the fallen pasha—faithful enough to flee with him.

CHAPTER XII.

> "Now from the bow came a noise of humming, and the crafty Odysseus sailed as he heard it."

WHEN that fateful evening cast its shadows over the bay, Spence and his score of fellow slaves were herded into their fish-shed, ironed as usual by wrist and ankle. But to-night they did not cast themselves down in hopeless despair on the piles of filthy nets. Instead there was a low murmur of talk in the shed.

Spence eyed his companions eagerly,

Three of them were from Newfoundland, the others were Boston men. Two over the score lay to one side, sorely wounded. All the officers of the Boston Lass had been calm at her taking, and now it was to Spence that these men looked for leadership. Nor did he fail them.

"Fear not, lads," he said quietly. "That Moor was no liar! He and a dozen more men stand ready to aid us, and he bears an order from Mulai Ali to free us. Once escaped, we are safe enough."

"And the lady, master?" spoke up lanky Cyrus Roberts, whom Spence had appointed to be his chief mate. "Be yon Moor a going to get her aboard the ship?"

"So he promised me," answered Spence. "Hark! Something has happened in the camp."

They fell silent, listening tensely. Something, indeed, had happened; the shallop had come to shore, bearing news of the disaster at Oran. Now, as the news spread through the camp, there arose a great tumult of cursing and shouting. Amid this clamor a dozen men stole into the shed, and their leader came to the side of Spence.

"Make haste, *capitán!*" he cried in Spanish. "Disaster has befallen our army at Oran, and already my emissaries are spreading news of Mulai Ali. Presently the tribesmen will be crying for the head of Ripperda—here are robes and swords."

The Moor and his men were already unlocking the irons of the seamen. From somewhere close at hand boomed a musket, followed by a shrill yell: "*Ras Ripperda!*"

"I must go!" exclaimed the Moor. "I shall see to the *señorita* and meet you at the boats. Take your time and move carefully, lest you be recognized. These men of mine will obey you. Order them in Castilian—farewell!"

He was gone, running out into the clamor that now made an inferno of the camp.

Spence, freed of his irons, rose and took charge. There was no further need of caution, for the Berber camp was now in tumultuous confusion, guns flashing and torches flaring on every hand. Spence's voice commanded the seamen sharply, as he stood beside the pile of robes and arms which had been brought by the Moors.

"Every man file past me and get a burnoose. Mr. Roberts! Take charge of these scimitars and deal them out, while I show the men how to get into the robes."

"Aye, aye, sir!" responded Roberts promptly.

For any in the feyer-hot camp to know that the Christian slaves were escaping, would provoke instant massacre, and Spence took no chances. He garbed each man in a burnoose, while Roberts handed out the swords and a few pistols which had been provided. Deep were the oaths of satisfaction which sounded as the men gripped the hilts and felt themselves once more free and about to strike a blow.

"Nigh enough like cutlasses, lads," sang out Roberts, "to make 'em swing well! All ready here, sir. Be they Moors goin' with us?"

Spence addressed the Moors, found that they were to help him capture the brigantine, and ordered them to lead the way. A last word to his men.

"Not a word until we get under her side, lads, or we may lose everything! She is Ripperda's own ship, and if he gets aboard her we may have stiff work of it. But she's our only chance of getting home again—look alive! Follow the Moors."

It was the hope of Spence that he might not only capture the brigantine, but take Ripperda prisoner, for it was deemed certain that Ripperda would flee to his ship. Even Spence perceived, when he emerged from the shed, that this was an impossibility. From every side the Berbers were surrounding the little eminence on which stood Ripperda's camp, and the pasha was quite cut off from shore.

"Unless he gets away by land, he's done for," thought Spence, listening to the frenzied yells of the mob.

Meantime, with his men, he was approaching the shore, where the fisher boats lay drawn up. Here, everything was darkness and confusion; several boats were creeping over the water between the shore and the anchored ships, and the Moors who were leading the party of white men came to a halt, counseling a wait for their leader.

Spence controlled the eagerness of his

men, anxiously awaiting news of Mistress Betty. Suddenly a growl broke from Roberts.

"Master Spence! They've doused the lights on the brigantine—if they're not a hauling of her out, then sink me for a Dutchman! Aye—can hear the clink o' the pawls—kedging her, they are."

True enough. Spence, hearing that sound, imagining that he could see the vague shape of the brigantine already moving across the water, caught his breath sharply. He breathed a prayer as he stood there in agonized suspense. Freedom—slipping away in the darkness! Without that brigantine they were lost. He knew it, the others knew it. And they waited for a girl.

Around him he could feel the tense straining and quivering of the seamen—their panting breaths, their awful agony of fear in that moment. From one bronzed throat came a stifled groan, then silence again. At length one man spoke up in terrorized accents.

"Master Spence! 'Tis too much to bide here doing naught, waiting for a lady."

Somebody smote the man; there was the thud of a blow, then desperate silence. Spence felt a thrill as he sensed the quality of these seamen, sacrificing their hopes, jeopardizing their chances of escape for a girl they had never seen. He knew how bitter hard was that self-control.

"Ready at the boats, men," he said quietly. "Lay the wounded men aboard and stand by to launch."

A rustle of movement, a scrape of feet as they obeyed. All the while from the camp and the hill there was a flittering of torches and a continual outcry from the Berbers; the hapless servants of Ripperda were being slaughtered there.

Then a burst of running feet, and three men came hurtling out of the tumult. The foremost was the Moorish leader who had freed Spence, and from him came a sharp, terrible burst of words.

"She is gone! Gholam Mahmoud has seized her, taken her aboard Ripperda's ship—he and his men have seized the ship."

"Launch!" Like the snap of a taut cable came the word from Spence. "Run 'em out, lads—the lady is board the brigantine—after her!"

A growl of excited oaths, a heaving of bodies, and the cumbersome fisher boats were scraped over the shingle. The men tumbled aboard, seamen and Moors intermixed, and there was a moment of confusion.

Spence, with six seamen only in his craft, and the Moorish leader were the first to get away. The oars dipped and tugged, the boat drew out from shore.

"What of Ripperda?" murmured Spence. The Moor whispered an oath.

"Escaped, may Allah blast him! His bodyguard rode away with him. Gholam Mahmoud had a dozen men there; they seized the lady and Ripperda's treasures, and got aboard his ship. I was detained."

"How many of them aboard her?"

"Thirty, at least, all corsairs."

Satisfied that the other boats were following, Spence drove ahead. The brigantine was moving along in tow of boats; she would catch the land breeze soon. Already sheaves were squeaking and canvas was slapping. A moment afterward it was evident that Gholam Mahmoud no longer feared those ashore. Lanterns flashed on the deck, and hoarse shouts echoed; in the bows of the brigantine a cresset broke out its smoky flare. Three boats towed her.

"At her, lads!" snapped Spence.

He steered for hanging lines in the ship's waist, and the men gave way. For a space it seemed that they would lay her board unchallenged; then, from her poop, cracked out a voice—the voice of Gholam Mahmoud. It was followed by the crack of a pistol.

"Off with the robes, lads! All up—boarders away!"

The boat surged forward—the oars fell. Spence caught a line, the agile Moor another, and they were over the rail. From the poop and bulwarks came a rush of men. The Moor emptied a pistol into them, then leaped forward with his curved blade swinging. Spence, cooler of head, stood by the rail, and his steel dropped the first man to reach him.

Now his men began coming over the side, sword in teeth; with a shout to them,

Spence threw himself forward to the rescue of the Moor embroiled amid a crowd.

"Hurray!"

The seamen streamed after him. A pistol cracked, and another; the Yankee rush burst the crowd asunder. The yell rose more shrill, as Spence's other boats came up, and for a moment he thought they would take the ship at a blow. Only for a moment! Now from stem and stern came a rush of figures; steel flamed in the lantern light; the confusion and whirl of blades made an inextricable turmoil across the deck. From all this stood forth one terrible vision which was burned into Spence's memory.

Himself engaged with a swarthy corsair, he saw Gholam Mahmoud cross blades with one of the Newfoundland men. A lantern lit them distinctly. He saw Gholam lean forward in a curious manner—saw his blade sweep out, then down and up—and with a scream the seaman died, ripped from abdomen to chin. It was the famous Mameluke stroke, the deadly and unavoidable cut which made the Mameluke swordsmen invincible throughout the east.

"Allah!" yelled the corsairs, and the Moors who fought for Spence responded in kind. Spence clove his way to the poop, and found the rail ahead of him. The waist was cleared. To bow and stern his men were driving the defenders. Then a rush changed the whole aspect. The seamen became bunched in the waist, fired on from poop and bow.

"Aft, lads!" shouted Spence, his voice rising over the din. "Aft! To the poop!"

He leaped up the ladder, gained the poop, and found himself assailed by a corsair, the *rais* of the ship. Spence fended his head with his blade, and the steel shivered. He reeled, saw the swarthy face whirl in upon him, and leaped barehanded. He jerked up the bearded head, caught the naked torso, threw all his power into the terrific wrench. The corsair shrieked once, then went limp as his neck twisted.

"Up with you, men!" shouted Spence, but they were already coming.

From the deck Spence caught up a sword and led the rush. Behind, from the bow, the corsairs were pursuing, but the seamen gained the poop and began to clear it. Now amid the turmoil, Spence caught a glimpse of a white figure by the starboard rail, dragging a lantern from its place. He stared, incredulous, at the face of Mistress Betty—then a streak of fire and a roar leaped forth from her hand. A little swivel gun, mounted there at the rail, had been emptied into the crowded ranks of the corsairs!

In the flames of that discharge darted forward the face of Gholam Mahmoud, contorted and infernal in its rage. Spence saw the flash of a weapon, heard the girl cry out, hurled forward. Of what passed around him he saw nothing—now he had Gholam Mahmoud before him, and he heard the voice of Mistress Betty in his ears, and was fighting like a madman.

It was fortunate that Spence had seen and noted that dreaded Mameluke stroke, for now he saw Gholam Mahmoud lean forward again in that same curious manner. Spence leaped back and the blade hurtled up—a miss! Gholam snarled as Spence pressed in again. No words passed; the two men fought back toward the stern—back and back, quartering the deck with blow after blow.

Once again came that Mameluke stroke, this time so close that the steel point drew blood from Spence's chest. As the blow missed, almost before it had missed, Spence was in and struck fiercely, with all his strength.

He felt the blade go home—heard the sword of Gholam Mahmoud clatter down on the deck. Then, in a flash, the man leaped up to the rail—gained it! He stood there an instant, getting his balance for a spring to the water; in this instant came something like a streak of light that took him squarely between the shoulders.

A knife, it was—a long curved knife from the hand of a Moor.

Gholam Mahmoud threw out his arms, the knife haft standing from his back; then, convulsively, the body leaped. From below came a splash—no more.

Spence leaned on his sword, panting, out of breath, things swimming before his eyes. Nor could he move, even when Mistress Betty came to him; her voice seemed dis-

tant and far. Then he was dimly aware of Roberts exultantly addressing him.

"She's ours, Master Spence! Four of our lads killed, all a bit hurt—but she's ours!"

"Make sail," muttered Spence. "All hands—make sail!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"A randy, dandy, dandy-o,
A whet of ale and brandy-o,
With a rumbelow and a Westward-ho!
Heave, my mariners, all-o!"

TETUAN was passed, and the narrow way of Gib-al-Taric, and off Tangier the brigantine spoke a small galley which had come from the port to meet her. The two craft lay side by side, for the sea was like glass.

Here Spence said farewell to the Moor who had freed him, and to the six men who remained of the Moor's following.

From the lazaret of the brigantine was lifted a chest, one of several in which was laid away Ripperda's ill-gotten gold. This chest, with certain other plunder, was swung aboard the galley as Mulai Ali's share. Then Spence confided to the Moor that same water-stained leather box, which held in its care Ripperda's great schemes.

"To Mulai Ali this is worth more than the gold," he said. "Take it to him, with our thanks and good-will."

So the Moor passed to his own ship, and the galley departed. Spence called the crew into the waist, and with Mistress Betty beside him, laid a choice before them.

"Say now, lads, which way we steer? Whether to the north and England, or out across the Atlantic to home again. Many of you are wounded; we are short-handed; our charts are poor, our instruments worse. Yet we have food and drink to spare. Settle the matter by vote, and let us get out of these waters."

Now the men, grinning, looked one at another. Roberts was urged forth as spokesman. He touched his forelock to the girl, and regarded Spence with a wide smile.

"Why, sir, as to instruments and charts and such, that be your business. But that there gold down below—be there much left?"

Spence laughed. "Enough to make us all rich men, lads, and Ripperda pays the shot! So speak out freely."

"Well, sir, we would be fools to steer for any English port wi' that gold below," said Roberts. "The less any one knows of our business, say we, the better! If it please you, Master Spence, we vote to make Boston town, and if the royal governor hears naught o' that there gold, 'twill be good luck for us!"

"Very well," said Spence. "Master Roberts, lay the course for the Azores, and we'll try our fortune for home!"

A cheer echoed up from the crew. Spence turned to the girl—met her grave regard.

"Well, Mistress Betty! Will you be saddened in heart to see the hills of Boston over our bow instead of the chalk cliffs of Dover?"

A smile lightened in the eyes of the girl as her hand crept into his.

"Dear Patrick! Hast never read your Bible, then? Dost not remember what Ruth said to the man in whose hand her own lay—even as mine lies in yours?"

And Patrick Spence laughed out as he looked with her to the west, and the ship swung about to the wind.

THE END.

U U U U

William J. Flynn, for twenty-five years chief of the United States Secret Service, has collaborated with George Barton on a series of vividly told detective stories under the general title

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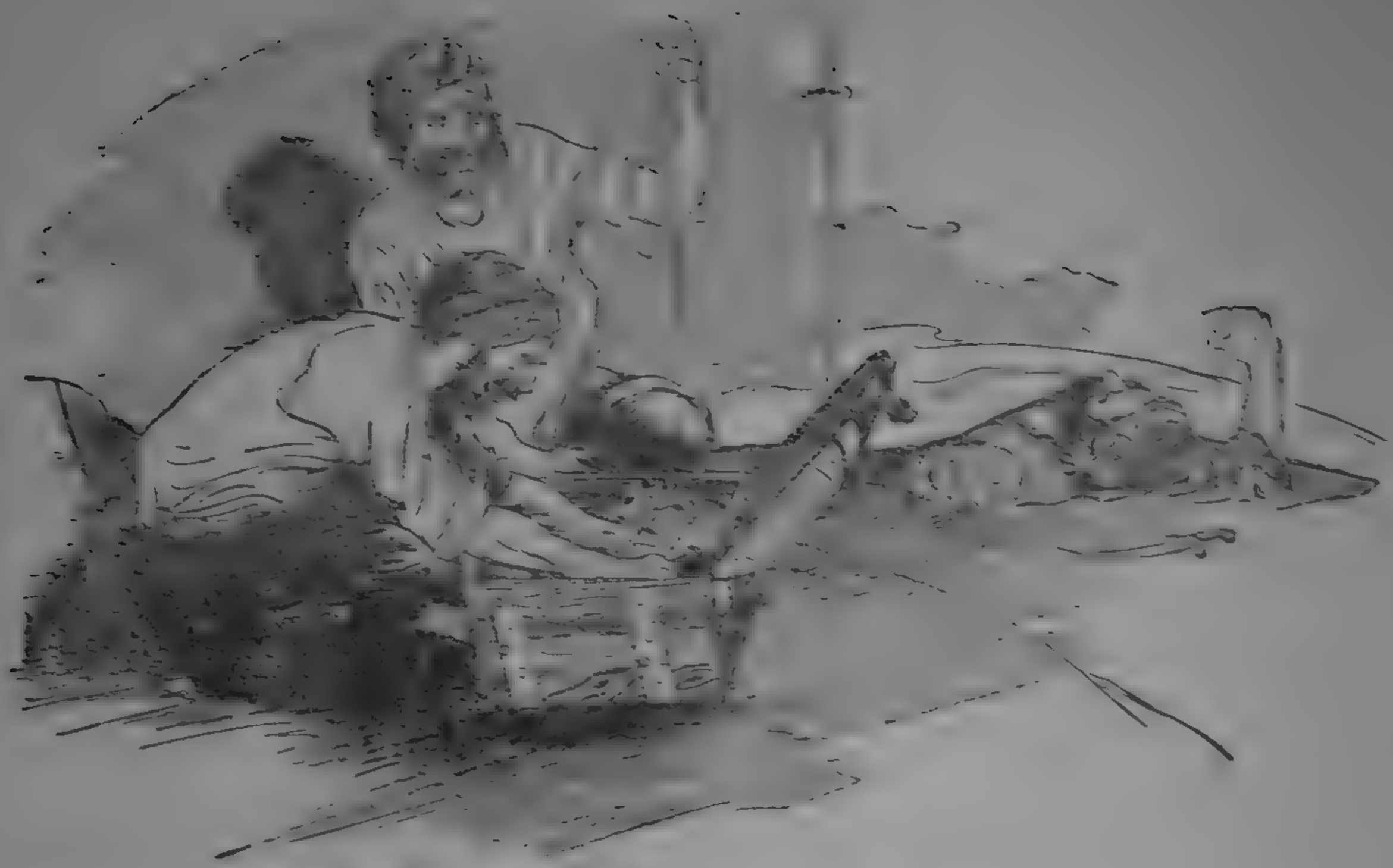

Caste

By W. A. FRASER

Author of "The Three Sapphires," "Thoroughbreds," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

[redacted]

CHAPTER VII.

"... SCRAPERS OF SKULLS! PAH!"

PERHAPS it was the customs official that told Deman Sevik about the *Ke Dikar*—the Lamp of Akbar—the ruby that was so called because of its [illegible] as [illegible] in the [illegible] of the merchant.

This ruby had been an eye in one of the two golden jeweled peacocks that surmounted the "Peacock Throne" at Delhi in the time of Akbar to the time when the Persian conqueror, Nadir Shah, seized

Delhi and took the Peacock Throne and the Kohinoor, and everything else of value back to Persia. But he didn't get the ruby, for the Vizier of the King of Delhi stole it. Then Alam, the eunuch, stole it from the vizier. Its possession was desirable, not only because of its great value as a jewel, but because it held in its satanic glitter an unearthly power, either of preservation to its holder or malignant evil against his enemies.

At any rate, Sewlal sent for Hunsa the night of the ordeal and explained to him, somewhat casually, that a jewel merchant passing through Mahrattaland, had in his collection a ruby of no great value, but a stone that he would like to become possessed of because a ruby was his lucky gem. The Dewan intimated that Hunsa would get a nice private reward for this particular gem, if by chance he could, quite secretly, procure it for him.

Next day was a busy one in the Bagree camp.

Having followed the profession of decoits and thugs for generations it was with them a fine art; unlimited pains were taken over every detail. As it had been decided that they would go as a party of mendicants and bearers of family bones to Mother Ganges, there were many things to provide to carry out the masquerade—stage properties, as it were—red bags for the bones of females and white bags for those of the males.

In two days one of the spies came with word that Ragganath, the merchant, had started on his journey, riding in a covered cart drawn by two of the slim, silk-skinned, trotting bullocks, and was accompanied by six men, servants and guards. On the second night he would encamp at Sarorra. So a start was made the next morning.

Sookdee, Ajeet Singh, and Hunsa, accompanied by twenty men and Gulab Begum, took the road, the Gulab traveling in an enclosed cart as befitted the favorite of a rajah, and with her rode the wife of Sookdee as her maid.

Ajeet rode a Marwari stallion, a black, roach-crested brute, with bad hocks and an evil eye. Ajeet sat his horse a convincing figure, a Rajput rajah.

Beneath a rich purple coat gleamed, like silver tracery, his steel shirt of mail; through his sash of red silk was thrust a straight-bladed sword, and from the top of his turban of blue and gold thread peeped a red cap with dangling tassel of gold.

In the afternoon of the second day the Bagrees came to the village of Sarorra.

"We will camp here," the leader commanded, "close to the mango *tope* through which we have just passed, then we will summon the headman, and if he is as such accursed officials are, the holy one, the *yogi*, will cast upon him and his people a curse; also I will threaten him with the loss of his ears."

"The one who is to be destroyed has not yet come," Hunsa declared, "for here is what these dogs of villagers call a place of rest, though it is but an open field."

Ajeet turned upon the jamadar: "The one who is to be destroyed, say you, Hunsa? Who spoke in council that the merchant was to be killed? We are men of decoity—we rob these fat pirates who rob the poor, but we take life only when it is necessary to save our own."

"And when a robbed one who has power, such as rich merchants have, make complaint and give names, the powers take from us our profit and cast us into jail," Hunsa retorted.

"And forget not, Ajeet, that we are here among the Mahrattas far from our own forests that we can escape into if there is outcry," Sookdee interjected. "If the voices are hushed and the bodies buried beneath where we cook our food, there will be only silence till we are safe back in Karowlee. The Dewan will not protect us if there is an outcry—he will deny that he has promised protection."

The Bagrees were already busy preparing the camp, the camp of a supposed party of men on a sacred mission.

It was like the locating of a circus. The tents they had brought stood gaudily in the hot sun, some white and some of cotton cloth dyed in brilliant colors, red, and blue, and yellow. In front of Ajeet's tent a bamboo pole was planted, from the top of which floated a red flag carrying a figure of the monkey-god, Hanuman, embroidered in green and yellow.

The red and white bags carrying bones, which were supposed to be the bones of defunct relatives, were suspended from tripods of bamboo to preserve them from the pollution of the soil.

And presently, three big drums, nakaras, were ranged in front of the *yogi's* tent, and were being beaten by strong-armed drummers, while a conch-shell blared forth a discordant note that was supposed to be pleasing to the gods.

Some of the Bagrees issued from their tents having suddenly become canonized, metamorphosed from highwaymen to devout *yogis*, their bodies, looking curiously lean and ascetic, now clothed largely in ashes and paint.

"Go you, Hunsa," Ajeet commanded, "into this depraved village and summon the *patil* to come forth and pay to the sainted *yogi* the usual gift of one rupee four annas, and make his salaams. Also he is to provide fowl and fruits for us who are on this sacred mission. He may be a son of swine, such as the lord of a village is, so speak, jamadar, of the swords the rajah's guards carry. Say nothing as to the expected one, but let your eyes do all the questioning."

Hunsa departed on his mission, and even then the villagers could be seen assembled between the Bagrees and the mud huts, watching curiously the encampment.

"Sookdee," Ajeet said, "if we can rouse the anger of the *patil*—"

The jamadar laughed. "If you insist upon the payment of silver you will accomplish that, Ajeet."

Ajeet touched his slim fingers to Sookdee's arm. "Do not forget, jamadar—call me rajah. But as to the village; if we anger them they will not entertain the merchant—they will not let him rest in the village. And also, if they are of an evil temper we will warn the merchant that they are thieves who will cut his throat and rob him. We will give him the protection of our numbers."

"If the merchant is fat—and when they attain wealth they always become fat—he will be happy with us, rajah, thinking perhaps that he will escape a gift of money the *patil* would exact."

"Yes," Ajeet Singh answered, "we will ask him for nothing when he departs."

After a time Hunsa was seen approaching, and with him the gray-whiskered *patil*.

The latter was a commoner. He suggested a black-faced, gray-whiskered monkey of the jungles. Indeed, the pair were an anthropoid couple, Hunsa the gorilla, and the headman an ape. Behind them straggled a dozen villagers, men armed with long ironwood sticks of combat.

The headman salaamed the *yogi* and Ajeet, saying: "This is but a poor place for holy men and the rajah to rest, for the water is bad, and famine is upon us."

"A liar, and the son of a wild ass," declared Ajeet promptly. "Give to this saint the gift of silver, lest he put the anger of Kali upon you, and call upon her of the fiery furnace in the sacred hills to destroy your houses. Also send fowl and grain, and think yourself favored of Kali that you make offering to such a holy one, and to a rajah who is in favor with Sindhia."

But the villager had no intention of parting with worldly goods if he could get out of it. He expostulated, enlarged upon his poverty, rubbed dust upon his forehead, and called upon the gods to destroy him if he had a breakfast in the whole village for himself and people, declaring solemnly: "By my *juwa!*"—though he wore no sacred thread—"there is no food for man or horse in the village." Then he waxed angry, asking indignantly who were these stragglers upon the road that they should come to him, an official of the Peshwa, to demand tribute; he would have them destroyed. Beyond, not two *kos* away, were a thousand soldiers—which was a gorgeous lie—who, if he but sent a messenger, would come and behead the lot, would cast the sacred bones in the gaudy bags upon the dunghill of the village bullocks.

"To-morrow, monkey man, the gift will be [illegible]," Ajeet [illegible] "for that is the law, and you know it."

But the *patil*, thinking there would be little fight in the party of pilgrims and mendicants, called to his stickmen to bring help and they would beat these insolent ones and drive them on their way.

"Take the *yogi*, Hunsa," Ajeet said,

"and the men that have the fire powder and throw it upon the thatched roof of a hut in the way of a visitation from the gods, because this ape will not leave us in peace for our mission until he is subdued."

In obedience, as Hunsa and the *yogi* moved toward the village, the *patil* cried, "Where go you?"

"We go with a message from the gods to you who offer insult to a holy one," the *yogi* replied.

The villagers, armed with sticks, retreated slowly before the *yogi*, dreading to offer harm to the sainted one. Muttering his curses, his iron tongs clanking at every step, the *yogi* strode to the first mudwall huts, and there, raising his voice, cried aloud: "Maha Kali! Consume the houses of these men of an evil heart who would deny the offering to Thee."

Then, at a wave of his skeleton arm, the two men threw upon the thatched roof of a hut a gray preparation of gunpowder which was but a pyrotechnical trick, and immediately the thatch burst into flames.

"There, accursed ones, unbelievers! Kali has spoken!" the *yogi* declared solemnly, and turning on his heels, went back to the camp.

The headman and his men, with howls of dismay, rushed back to stop the conflagration. And just then the jewel merchant arrived in his cart. The curtains of the canopy were thrown back and the fat Hindu sat blinking his owl eyes in consternation. At sight of Ajeet he descended, salaamed, and asked:

"Has there been a decoity in the village? Is it war and bloodshed?"

Ajeet assumed the haughty, condescending manner of a Rajput prince, and explained, with a fair scope of imagination, that the *patil* was a man of ungovernable temper, who gave protection to thieves and outlaws, that the village itself was a nest for them. That two of his servants, having gone into the village to purchase food, had been set upon, beaten and robbed; that the conflagration had been caused by the fire from a gun that one of the debased villagers had poked through a hole in the roof to shoot his servants.

"As my name is Ragganath, it is a visitation upon these scoundrels," the merchant declared.

"It is, indeed, sethjee."

Ajeet had diplomatically used the "sethjee," which was a friendly rendering of the name "seth," meaning "a merchant," and the wily Hindu, not to be outdone in courtesy, promoted Ajeet.

"Such an outrage, Maharaja, on the part of these low-caste people in the presence of the sainted one, and the pilgrims upon such a sacred mission to Mother Gunga, has brought upon them the wrath of the gods. May the village be destroyed, and the *patil* when he dies come back to earth a snake, to crawl upon his belly."

"The headman even refused to give the holy one the gift of silver, tendering instead threats," Ajeet added.

The merchant spat his contempt when he heard this.

"Wretches!" he declared, "debased associates of skinners of dead animals, and scrapers of skulls! Bah!" and he spat again. "And to think but for the Presence having arrived here first I most assuredly would have gone into this village, and perhaps have been slain for my—"

He stopped and rolled his eyes apprehensively. He had been on the point of mentioning his jewels, but, though he was among saints and kings, he suddenly remembered the danger.

"We would not have camped here," Ajeet declared, "had we not been a strong party, because this village has an evil reputation. You have been favored by the gods in finding honest men in the way of protection, and, no doubt, it is because you are one who makes offerings to the deity."

"And if the Maharaja will suffer the presence of a poor merchant, who is but a shopkeeper, I will rest here in his protection."

Ajeet Singh graciously consented to this, and the merchant commanded his men to erect his small tent beneath the limbs of the deep green mango trees.

The decoits watched closely the transport of the merchant's effects from the cart to the tent. When a strong iron box, that was an evident weight for its two carriers, was borne first, their eyes glistened. There-

in was the wealth of jewels the flying horseman of the night had whispered to the yogi about.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ART OF THE STRANGLER.

WHEN the merchant's tent had been erected, and he had gone to its shelter, the jamadars, sitting well beyong the reach of his ears, held a council of war. Ajeet was opposed to the killing of Ragganath and his men, but Hunsa pointed out that it was the only way; they were either decoits or they were men of toil, men of peace. Dead men were not given to carrying tales, and if no stir were made about the decoity until they were safely back in Karowlee they could enjoy the fruits of their spoil, which would be, undoubtedly, great. By the use of the strangling cloth there would be no outcry, no din of battle; they of the village would think that the camp was one of sleep. Then when the bodies had been buried in a pit, the earth tramped down flat and solid, and cooking fires built over it to obliterate all traces of a grave, they would strike camp and go back the way they had come.

Ajeet was forced to admit that it was the one thorough way, but he persisted that they were decoits, and not thugs.

At this Sookdee laughed. "Jamadar," he said, "what matters to a dead man the manner of his killing? Indeed it is a merciful way, such as Bhowanee herself decreed—in a second it is over. But with the spear, or the sword—ah! I have seen men writhe in agony and die ten times before it was an end."

"But a caste is a caste," Ajeet objected, "and the manner of the caste. We are decoits, and we only slay when there is no other way."

Hunsa tipped his gorilla body forward from where it rested on his heels as he sat, and his lowering eyes were sullen with impatience:

"Chief Ajeet," he snarled, "think you that we can rob the seth of his treasure without an outcry—and if there is an outcry, that he will not go back to those of his caste in Poona, and when trouble is made, think you that the Dewan will thank us for the bungling of this? And as to the matter of a thug or a decoit, half our men have been taught the art of the strangler. With these"—and extending his massive arms he closed his coarse hands in a gnarled grip—"with these I would, with one sharp in-turn on the *roomel*, crack the neck of the merchant and he would be dead in the taking of a breath. And, Ajeet, if this is the manner of men that causes you fear—"

"Hunsa"—and Ajeet's voice was constrained in its deadliness—"that ass's voice of thine will yet bring you to grief."

But Sookdee interposed.

"Let us not quarrel," he said. "Ajeet no doubt has in his mind Bootea, as I have Meena. And it would be well if the two were sent on the road in the cart, and when our work is completed we will follow. Indeed they may know nothing but that there is some jewel, such as women love, to be given them."

"Look you," cried Hunsa, thrusting his coarse hand out toward the road, "even Bhowanee is in favor. See you not the jackal?"

Turning their eyes in the direction Hunsa indicated, a jackal was seen slinking across the road from right to left.

"Indeed it is an omen," Sookdee corroborated, "if on our journeys to commit a decoity that is always a good omen."

"And there is the voice!" Hunsa exclaimed, as the tremulous lowing of a cow issued from the village.

He waved a beckoning hand to Guru Lal, for they had brought with them their tribal priest as an interpreter of omens chiefly. "Is not the voice of the cow heard at sunset a good omen, Guru?" he demanded.

"Indeed it is," the priest affirmed. "If the voice of a cow is heard issuing at twilight from a village at which decoits are to prey, it is surely a promise from Bhowanee that a large store of silver will be obtained."

"Take thee to thy prayers, Guru," Ajeet commanded, "for we have matters to settle." He turned to Sookdee. "Your omens will avail little if there is prosecution ever

the disappearance of the merchant. I am supposed to be in command, the leader, but I am the led. I will not withdraw, and it is not the place of the chief to handle the *roomal*. We will eat our food, and after the evening prayers will sit about the fire and amuse this merchant with stories such as honest men and holy ones converse in, that he may be at peace in his mind. As Sookdee says, the women will be sent to the grove of trees we came through on the road."

"We will gather about the fire of the merchant," Sookdee declared, "for it is in the mango grove and hidden from the sight of the villagers. Also, a guard will be placed between here and the village, and one upon the roadway."

"And while we hold the merchant in amusement," Hunsa added, "men will dig the pits here, two of them, each within a tent, so that they will not be seen at work."

"Yes, Ajeet," Sookdee said with a suspicion of a sneer, "we will give the merchant the consideration of a decent burial, and not leave him to be eaten by jackals and hyenas as were the two soldiers you finished with your sword when we robbed the camel transport that carried the British gold in Oudh."

"If it is to be, cease to chatter like jays," Ajeet answered crossly.

In keeping with their assumed characters, the evening meal was ushered in with a peace-shattering clamor from the drums and a raucous blare from conch-shell horns. Then the devout murderers offered up prayers of fervency to the great god, beseeching their more immediate branch of the deity, Bhowanee, to protect them.

And at the same time, just within the mud walls of Sarorra, its people were placing flowers and coconuts and sweetmeats upon the shrine of the god of their village.

Just without the village gate the elephant-nosed Ganesh sat looking in whimsical good nature across his huge paunch toward the place of crime, the deep shadow that lay beneath the green-leafed mango trees.

In the hearts of the Bagrees there was unholy joy, an eager anticipation, a gladsome feeling toward Bhowanee who had certainly guided this rapacious merchant with his iron box full of jewels to their camp. Indeed they would sacrifice a buffalo at her temple of Kajuria, for that was the habit of their clan when the booty was great. The taking of life was but an incident. In Hindustan humans came up like flies, returning over and over to again encumber the crowded earth. In the vicissitudes of life before long the merchant would pass for a reincarnation of his soul, and probably, because of his sins as an oppressor of the poor, come back as a turtle or a jackass; certainly not as a revered cow—he was too unholy. In the gradation of humans he was but a merchant of the caste of the third dimension in the great quartet of castes. It would not be like killing a Brahmin, a sin in the sight of the great god.

This philosophy was as subtle as the perfume of a rose, unspoken, even at the moment a floaty thought. Like their small hands and their erect air of free men—the Rajput atmosphere—it had grown into their created being, like the hunting instinct of a Rampore hound.

The merchant, smoking his *hookah*, having eaten, observed with keen satisfaction the evening devotions of the supposed mendicants. As it grew dark their *guru* was offering up a prayer to the holy cow, for she was to be worshiped at night. The merchant's appreciation was largely a worldly one, a business sense of insurance—safety for his jewels and nothing to pay for security—men so devout would have the gods in their mind and not robbery. When the jamadars and some of the Bagrees who were good story tellers, and one a singer, did him the honor of coming to sit at his camp fire he was pleased.

"Sit you here at my right," he said to Hunsa, for he conceived him to be captain of the rajah's guard.

Sookdee and the others, without apparent motive, contrived it so that a Bagree or two sat between each of the merchant's men, engaging them in pleasant speech, tendering tobacco. And, as if in modesty, some of the Bagrees sat behind the retainers.

"This is indeed a courtesy," the mer-

chant assured Hunsa. "A poor trader feels honored by a visit from so brave a soldier as the captain of the rajah's guard."

He noticed, too, with inward satisfaction, that the jamadars had left their weapons behind, which they had done in a way of not arousing their victim's fears.

"Would not it be deemed a courtesy," the merchant asked, "if one like myself, who is a poor trader, should go to pay his respects to the rajah ere he retires, for, of course, it would be beneath his dignity to come to his servant?"

"No, indeed," declared Hunsa quickly, thinking of the graves that were even then being dug. "He is a man of a haughty temper, and when he is in the society of the beautiful dancing girl who is with him, he cares not to be disturbed. Even now he is about to escort her in the cart down the road to where there is a shrine that women of that caste make offering to."

It had been arranged that Ajeet would escort Bootea, with two Bagrees as attendants, to the grove of trees half a mile down the road. He had insisted on this in the way of a negative support to the murder. As there would be no fighting this did not reflect on his courage as a leader. And as to complicity, Hunsa knew that as the leader of the party, Ajeet would be held the chief culprit. It was always the leader of a gang of decoits who was beheaded when captured, the others perhaps escaping with years of jail. And Hunsa himself, even Sookdee, would be safe, for they were in league with the Dewan.

There was an hour of social talk. Many times Hunsa fingered the *roomal* that was about his waist; the yellow and white strangling cloth with which Bhowanee had commanded her disciples, the thugs, to kill their victims. In one corner of it was tied a silver rupee for luck. The natural ferocity of his mind threw him into an eager anticipation; he took pride in his proficiency as a strangler; his coarse, heavy hands, like those of a Punjabi wrestler, were suited to the task. Grasping the cloth at the base of a victim's skull, tight to the throat, a side-twist inward, and the trick was done, the spine snapped like a pipe stem. And he had been somewhat out of practice—he regretted that; he was fearful of losing the art, the knack.

Around the fat paunch of the merchant was a silver-studded belt. Hunsa eyed this speculatively. Beyond doubt in its neighborhood would be the key to the iron box; and when its owner lay on his back, his bulbous eyes glaring upward to where the moon trickled through the thick foliage of the mango tree beneath which they sat, he would seize the keys and be the first to dabble his grimy fingers in the glittering gems.

Beyond, the village had hushed, the strident call of voices had ceased. Somewhere a woman was pounding grain in a wooden mortar—a dull, monotonous *thud, thud, swish, thud* carrying on the dead air. Nightjars were circling above the trees, their plaintive call, "Chy-eece, chy-e-ece!" filtering downward like the weird cry of spirits. Once the deep, sonorous bugling note of the *saurus*, like the bass pipe of an organ, smote the stillness as the giant crane winged its way up the river that lay beyond, a mighty ribbon of silver in the moonlight. A jackal from the far side of the village, in the fields, raised a tremulous moan.

Sookdee looked into the eyes of Hunsa, and he understood. It was the *tibao*, the happiest augury of success, for it came over the right shoulder of the victim.

Hunsa, feeling that the moment to strike had come, rose carelessly, saying: "Give me tobacco."

That was a universal signal among thugs, the command to strike.

Even as he uttered the words Hunsa had slipped behind the merchant and his towel was about the victim's neck. Each man who had been assigned as a strangler had pounced upon his individual victim, while Sookdee stood erect, a knife in his hand, ready to plunge it into the heart of any one who was likely to overcome his assailant.

Hunsa had thrown the helpless merchant upon his face, and with one knee between his shoulder blades, had broken the neck. No sound beyond the gurgling breath of strangulation had passed the Hindu's lips. There had been no clamor, no outcry; nothing but a few smothered words, gasps,

the scufile of feet upon the earth; it was like a horrible nightmare, a fantastic orgy of murderous fiends. The flame of the camp fire flickered sneers, drawn torture, red and green shadows in the staring faces of the men who lay upon the ground, and the figures of the stranglers glowed red in its light, like devils who danced in hell.

Hunsa had turned the merchant upon his back, and his evil gorilla face was thrust into the face of his victim. No breath passed the thick, protruding lips, upon which was the froth of death.

As the jamadar tore the keys from the waist band, snapping a silver chain that was about the body, he said: "Sookdee, be quick. Have the bodies carried to the pits. Do not forget to drive a spear through each belly, lest they swell up and burst open the earth."

"You have the keys to the chest, Hunsa?" Sookdee said, with suspicion in his voice.

"Yes, jamadar. I will open it. We will empty it, and place the iron box on top of the bodies in a pit, for it is too heavy to carry, and if we are stopped it might be observed."

"Take the dead," Sookdee commanded the Bagrees, "lay them out, take down the tents that are over the pits, and by that time I will be there to count these dead things in the way of surety that not one has escaped with the tale.

"Come," he said to Hunsa, "together we will go to the iron box and open it; then there can be no suspicion that the men of Alwar have been defrauded."

Hunsa turned malignant eyes upon Sookdee, but, keys in hand, strode toward the tent.

Sookdee, thrusting in the fire a torch made from the feathery bark of the *kujoor* tree, followed.

Hunsa, kneeling before the iron box, was fitting the keys into the double locks. Then he threw the lid backward, and the two gasped at a glitter of precious stones that lay beneath a black velvet cloth Hunsa stripped from the gems.

Sookdee cried out in wonderment; and Hunsa, slobbering gutturals of avarice, patted the gems with his gorilla paws. He lifted a large square emerald entwined in a tracery of gold, delicate as the crisscross of a spider's web, and held it to his thick lips.

"A bribe for a princess!" he gloated. "Take you this, Sookdee, and hide it as you would your life, for as gift to the son of the Peshwa, who, methinks, is behind the Dewan in this, we will be men of honor. And this"—a gleaming diamond in a circlet of gold—"for Sirdar Baptiste," and he rolled it in his loin cloth. "And this"—a string of pearls, that as he laid it on the black velvet, was like the tears of angels—"this for the fat pig of a Dewan to set his four wives at each other's throats. Let not the others know of these, Sookdee, of these that we have taken for the account."

Suddenly there was a clamor of voices, cries, the clang of swords, the sharp crash of a shot, and the two jamadars, startled, eyes staring, stood with ears cocked toward the tumult.

"Soldiers!" Sookdee gasped. His hand brushed Hunsa's bare arm as he thrust it into the chest and brought it forth clasping jewels, which he tied in a knot of his waistcloth. "Take you something, Hunsa, and lock the box till we see," he said, darting from the tent.

Hunsa filled a pocket of his brocaded jacket, but he was looking for the Akbar Lamp, the ruby. He lifted out a tray and ran his grimy hands through the maze of gold- and silver-wrought ornaments below. His fingers touched, at the very bottom, a bag of leather. He tore it open, and a blaze of blood-red light glinted at him evilly where a ruby caught the flame of the torch that Sookdee had thrown to the earth floor as he fled.

With a snarl of gloating he rolled the ruby in a fold of his turban, locked the box, and darted after Sookdee.

He all but fell over the seven dead bodies of the merchant and his men as he raced to where a group was standing beyond. And there three more bodies lay upon the ground, and beside them, held, were two horses.

"It is Ajeet Singh," Sookdee said, pointing to where the chief lay with his head in

the lap of a decoit. "These two native soldiers of the English came riding in with swiftness, for behind them raced Ajeet, who must have seen them pass."

"And here," another added, "as the riders checked at sight of the dead, Ajeet pulled one from his horse and killed him, but the other, with a pistol, shot Ajeet, and he is dead."

"The chief is not dead," said the one who held his head in his lap; "he is but shot in the shoulder, and I have stopped the blood with my hand."

"And we have killed the other soldier," another said, for, having seen the bodies, we could not let him live."

From Sookdee's hand dangled a coat of one of the dead.

"This, that is a leather purse," he said, "contains letters; the red thing on them I have looked upon before—it is the seal of the Englay. It was here in the coat of that one who is a sergeant—the other being a soldier."

He put the leather case within the bosom of his shirt, adding: "This may even be of value to the Dewan. Beyond that, there was little of loot upon these dogs of the Englay—eight rupees. The coats and the turbans we will burn."

Hunsa stooped down and slipped the sandals from the feet of the one Sookdee had pointed out as the officer.

"The footwear is of little value, but we will take the brass cooking pots of the merchant," Sookdee said, eying this performance; there was suspicion in his eyes lighted from the flare of their camp fires.

"Sookdee," Hunsa said, "you have the Englay leather packet, but they do not send *sowars* through the land of the Mahratta with the real message written on the back of the messenger. In quiet, I will rip apart the soles of this footwear. Do you that with the saddles; therein is often hidden the true writing. In the slaying of these two we have acquired a powerful enemy, the English, and the message, if there be one, might be traded for our lives. Here are the keys to the box, for it is heavy."

Into Hunsa's mind had flashed the thought that the gods had opened the way, for he had plotted to do this thing—the destruction of Ajeet.

"Have all the bodies thrown into the pit, Sookdee," he advised, "make perfect the covering of the fire and ash, and while you prepare for flight I will go and bring Bootea's cart to carry Ajeet."

Then Hunsa was swallowed up in the gloom of the night, melting like a shadow into the white haze of the road as he raced like a gray wolf toward the Gulab, who now had certainly been delivered into his hands.

Soon his heart pumped and the choke of exertion slowed him to a fast walk. The sandals, bulky with their turned-up toes, worried him. He drew a knife from his sash and slit the tops off, muttering: "If it is here, the message of value, it will be between the two skins of the soles."

Now they lay flat and snug in his hand as he quickened his pace.

CHAPTER IX.

SPAWN OF A SHE-LEOPARD!

THE Gulab heard the shot at the Bagree camp, and Hunsa found her trembling from apprehension.

"What has happened, jamadar?" she cried. "Ajeet heard the beat of iron-shod hoofs upon the road, and seeing in the moonlight the two riders, knew from the manner they sat the saddles that they were of the Englay service; when he called to them they heeded him not. Then Ajeet followed the two. Why was the shot, Hunsa?"

"They have killed Ajeet," Hunsa declared, "but also they are dead, and I have the leader's leather sandals for a purpose. The shot has roused the village, and even now our people are preparing for flight. Get you into the cart that I may take you to safety." He took the ruby from his turban, saying: "And here is the most beautiful ruby in Hind; the fat pig of a Dewan wants it, but I have taken it for you."

But Bootea pushed his hand away. "I take no present from you, Hunsa."

Hunsa put the jewel back in his turban and commanded the two men who stood waiting: "Make fast the bullocks to the

cart quickly, lest we be captured, because other soldiers are coming behind."

The two Bagrees turned to where the slim pink-and-gray coated trotting bullocks were tethered by their short horns to a tree, and leading them to the cart, made fast the bamboo yoke across their necks.

"Get into the cart, Bootea," Hunsa commanded, for the girl had not moved.

"I will not!" she declared. I'm going back to Ajeet; he is not dead—it is a trick."

"He *is* dead," Hunsa snarled, seizing her by the arm.

The Gulab screamed words of denunciation. "Take your hands off me, son of a pig, accursed man of low caste! Ajeet will kill you for this, dog!"

At this the wife of Sookdee fled, racing back toward the camp. One of the men darted forward to follow, but Hunsa stayed him, saying: "Let her go—it is better; I war not upon Sookdee."

He had the Gulab now in the grasp of both his huge paws, and holding her tight, said rapidly: "Be still, you she-devil, accursed fool! You are going to a palace to be a queen. The son of the Peshwa desires you. True, I also, have desire, but fear not for, by Bhowanee, it is a life of glory, of jewels and rich attire that I take you to; so get into the cart."

But Bootea wrenched free an arm and struck Hunsa full upon his ugly face, screaming her rebellion.

"To be struck by a woman!" Hunsa blared. "Not a woman, but the spawn of a she-leopard! Why should not I beat your beautiful face into ugliness with one of these sandals of a dead pig!"

He lifted her bodily, calling to the man upon the ground, the other having mounted behind the bullocks: "Put back the leather wall of the cart that I may hurl this outcast widow of a dead Hindu within."

Bootea clawed at his face; she kicked and fought; her voice screaming a call to Ajeet.

There was a heavy rolling thump of hoofs upon the roadway, unheard by Hunsa because of the vociferous struggle. Then from the shimmer of moonlight thrust the white form of a big Turkoman horse that was thrown almost to his haunches, his breast striking the back of the decoit.

The bullocks, nervous little brutes, startled by the huge white animal, swerved, and before the man who sat astraddle of the one shaft gathered tight the cord to their nostrils, whisked the cart to the roadside where it toppled over the bank for a fall of fifteen feet into a ravine, carrying bullocks and driver with it.

The moonlight fell full upon the face of the horseman, its light making still whiter the face of Captain Barlow.

And Bootea recognized him. It was the face that had been in her vision night and day since the *nautch*.

"Save me, *sahib!*" she cried. "These men are thieves; save me, *sahib!*"

The hunting crop in Barlow's hand crashed upon the thick head of Hunsa in ready answer to the appeal. And as the *sahib* threw himsef from the saddle the jamadar, with a snarl like a wounded tiger, dropped the girl and, whirling, grappled with the Englishman.

Barlow was strong; few men in the force, certainly none in the officer's mess, could put him on his back; and he was lithe, supple as a leopard; and in combat cool, his mind working like the mind of a chess player. But he realized that the arms about him were the arms of a gorilla, the chest against which he was being crushed was the chest of a trained wrestler; a smaller man would have heard his bones cracking in that clutch.

He raised a knee and drove it into the groin of the jamadar; then, in the slight slackening of the holding arms as the Bagree shrunk from the blow, he struck at the bearded chin. It was the clean, trained short-arm jab of a boxer.

But even as the gorilla wavered staggeringly under the blow, a soft something slipped about Barlow's throat and tightened like the coils of a python. And behind something was pressing him to his death. The other Bagree, springing to the assistance of Hunsa, had looped his *roomal* about the *sahib's* throat with the deft art of a

Barlow's senses were going; his brain swam; in his fancy he had been shot from a

cliff and was hurtling through space in which there was no air—his lungs had closed. In his brain a hammer was beating him into unconsciousness.

Then suddenly the pressure on his throat ceased, it fell away; the air rushed to the parched lungs. With a wrench his brain cleared, and he went down—but now with power in his arms, the arms that still clung about the dazed Hunsa, and he was on top.

Scarce aware of the action, out of a fighting instinct, he dragged from its holster his heavy pistol, and beat with its butt the ugly head beneath, beat it till it was still. Then he staggered to his feet and looked wonderingly at the form of the Bagrec behind, who lay sprawled on the road, a great red splash across his breast.

In the Gulab's hand was still clutched the dagger she had drawn from her girdle and driven home to save the *sahib* who had sat like a god in her heart. With the other hand she held out from contact with her limbs the muslin *sari* that was crimsoned where the blood of the Bagree had fountained when she drew forth her knife.

Barlow darted forward as Bootea reeled, and caught her with an arm. Close, the face, fair as that of a *memsahib* in the pallor of fright and the paling moonlight, sweet, of finer mold, more spiritual than the Mona Lisa's, Puritanically simple, the mass of black hair drawn straight back from the low, broad brow—for the rich turban had fallen in her fight for freedom—woke memory in the *sahib*. And as the blood ebbed back through the girl's veins, the pale cheeks flushed with rose, her eyelids quivered and drew back their shutters from eyes that were like those of an antelope.

"You—you, Gulab, the giver of the red rose, the singer of the love song!" Barlow gasped.

"Yes, Captain Sahib, you who are like a god—" Bootea checked herself· her head drooped.

But Barlow, putting his fingers under her chin and gently lifting the face, asked: "And what—what?"

"You came like one in a dream. Also, *sahib*, I am but one who danced before you and you have saved me."

"And, little girl, you saved my life."

He felt a shudder run through the girl's form, and then she pushed him from her crying: "*Sahib*—Hunsa! Quick!"

For the jamadar, recovering his senses, had risen to his knees, fumbling at his belt groggily for his knife.

Barlow swung the pistol from its holster and rushed toward Hunsa, but the latter, at sight of the dreaded weapon, fled, pursued for a few paces by the captain.

The girl saw the sandal soles lying upon the ground where Hunsa had dropped them in the struggle, and slipped them beneath her breast-belt, a quick thought coming to her that if the captain saw them he might recognize them as the footwear of the soldiers. Also Hunsa had said they were for a purpose.

Barlow followed the fleeing shadow for a dozen strides, then his pistol barked, and swinging on his heel he came back, saying, with a little laugh: "That was just to frighten the beggar so he wouldn't come back."

But Bootea's eyes went wide now with a new fear; the sound of the shot would travel faster even than the fleeing Hunsa, and if the decoits came—for already they would be making ready for the road—this beautiful god, with eyes like stars and a voice of music, would be killed, would be no more than the Bagree lying on the road, who was but carrion. In her heart was a new thing. The struggle with Hunsa, the fright, even the horribleness of the blood upon her knife, was washed away by a hot surging flood of exquisite happiness. The Hindu name for love—"a pain in the heart"—was veritably hers in its intensity; the *sahib's* arm about her when she had closed her eyes had caused her to feel as if she were being lifted to heaven.

She laid a hand on Barlow's arm and her eyes were lifted pleadingly to his. "You must go, *sahib*—mount your horse and go, because—"

"Because of what?"

"There are many, and you will be killed. Hunsa will bring others."

"Others—who are they?"

But the Gulab had turned from him and was listening, her eyes turned to the road

up when floated from beyond upon the hushed silence that was about them—that seemed deeper because of the dead man lying in the moonlight—the beat of Hunsa's feet on the road. Once there was the whining note of wheels that claimed a protest from a dry axle; once there was a clang as if steel had struck steel. And on the droning through the night hush was a rasping hum as if voices clamored in the distance. This was the beehive stirring of the startled village.

"What is it, Bootea?" Barlow asked.

The deep, full eyes raised to his face were full of fright, a pleading fright. "*Sahib*," she answered, "do not ask—just go; because—"

"Yes, girl, why?"

"That this is dead"—and her hand gestured toward the slain Bagree—"and that others are dead, is; but you—will you mount the horse and go back the way you came, *sahib?*"

Her small fingers clutched the sleeve of the coat he wore—it was of hunting cloth, red and green. "Others are dead yonder, and evil is in the hearts of those that live. Go, *sahib*—please go."

Barlow's mind was racing fast, in more materialistic grooves than the Gulab's. There was something about it he didn't understand; something the girl did not want to tell him; some horrible thing that she was afraid of—her face was full of suppressed dread.

Suddenly, through no sequence of reasoning—in fact there was no data to go upon—nothing except that a girl—the Gulab was just that—stood there afraid—through him she had just escaped from a man who was little more than an ape—stood quivering in the moonlight alone, except for himself. So, suddenly, he acted as if energized by logic, as if mental deduction made plain the way.

"You are right," he said, "we must go."

He laid a hand upon the bridle rein of the gray that had stood there in submission, saying, "Come, Bootea."

Foot in stirrup he swung to the saddle, and as the gray turned, he reached down both hands, saying: "Come, I'll take you wherever you want to go."

But the girl drew back and shook her beautifully modeled head—the delicate head with the black hair smoothed back to simplicity—and her voice was half sob. "It can't be, *sahib*. I am but—" She checked. To speak of the decoits even, might lead to talk that would cause the *sahib* to go to their camp, and he would be killed; and she would be a witness to testify against her own people, the slayers of the sepoys.

Barlow laughed. "Because you are a girl who dances you are not to be saved, eh?" he said. "But listen—the *sahibs* do not leave women at the mercy of villains; you must come," and his strong, sun-browned hands were held out.

Bootea, wonderingly, as if some god had called to her, put her hands in Barlow's, and with a twist of his strong arms she was swung across his knees.

"Put your arms about my waist, Gulab," he said, as the gray, to the tickle of a spur, turned to the road. "Don't lean away from me," he said, presently, "because we have a long way to go, and that tires. That's better, girl," as her warm breast pressed against his body.

The big gray, with a deep breath, and a sniffle of satisfaction, scenting that his head was turned homeward, paced along the ghost strip of roadway in long, free strides. Even when a jackal, or it might have been a honey badger, slipped across the road in front, a drifting shadow, the Turkoman only rattled the snafflebit in his teeth, cocked his ears, and then blew a breath of disdain from his big nostrils.

In the easy, swinging cradle of the horse's stride the minds of both Barlow and the Gulab relaxed into restfulness; her arms about the strong body, Bootea felt as if she clung to a tower of strength—that she was part of a magnetic power; and the nightmare that had been, so short a time since, had floated into a dream of content, of glorious peace.

Barlow was troubling over the problem of the gorilla-faced man, and thinking how close he had been to death—all but gone out except for that figure in his arms that was so like a lotus; and the death would have meant not just the forfeit of his life,

but that his duty, the mission he was upon for his own people, the British government, had been jeopardized by his participation in some native affair of strife, something he had nothing to do with. He had ridden along that road hoping to overtake the two riders that now lay dead in the pit with the other victims of the thugs—of which he knew nothing. They were bearing to him a secret message from his government, and he had ridden to Manabad, there to take it from them lest in approaching the city of the Peshwa, full of seditious spies and cutthroats, the paper might be stolen. But at Manabad he had learned that the two had passed, had ridden on; and then, perhaps because of converging different roads, he had missed them.

But most extraordinarily, just one of the curious, tangented ways of Fate, the written order lay against his chest, sewn between the double sole of a sandal. Once or twice the hard leather caused him to turn slightly the girl's body, and he thought it some case in which she carried jewels.

CHAPTER X.

THE SWEET PAIN IN THE HEART.

THEY had gone perhaps an eighth of a mile when the road they followed joined another, joined in an arrowhead. The gray turned to the left, to the west, the homing instinct telling him that that way lay his stall in the city of the Peshwa.

"This was the way of my journey, Bootea," Barlow said. "I rode from yonder," and he nodded back toward the highway into which the two roads wedged. "It was here that I heard your call, the call of a woman in dread. Also, it might have been a business that interested me if it had been a matter of waylaying travelers. Did you see two riders of large horses, such as Arabs or of the breed I ride, men who rode as do *sowars?*"

"No, *sahib*, I did not see them."

This was not a lie, for it was Ajeet who had seen them. And because of the *sahib's* interest she knew the two men must have been of his command; and if she spoke of them undoubtedly the *sahib* would go back and be killed.

"Were they servants of yours, *sahib*—these men who rode?"

Barlow gave off but a little sliver of truth. "No," he answered, "but at Manabad men spoke of them passing this way, journeying to Poona, and if they were strangers to this district, it might be that they had taken the wrong road at the fork. But if you did not see them they will be ahead."

"And meaning, *sahib*, it would not be right if they saw you bearing on your horse one who is not a *memsahib?*"

"As to that, Gulab, what might be thought by men of low rank is of no consequence."

"But if the *sahib* wishes to overtake them my burden upon the horse will be an evil, and he will be sorry that Bootea had not shame sufficient to refuse his help."

She felt the strong arm press her body closer, and heard him laugh. But still he did not answer, did not say why he was interested in the two horsemen. If it were vital—and she believed it was—for him to know that they lay dead at the Bagree camp, it was wrong for her not to tell him this, he who was a preserver. But to tell him would send him to his death. She knew, as all the people of that land knew, that the *sahibs* went where their rajah told them was their mission, and laughed at death; and the face of this one spoke of strength, and the eyes of placid fearlessness; so she said nothing.

The sandal soles that pinched her soft flesh she felt were a reproach—they had something to do with the thing that was between the *sahib* and the dead soldiers. There were tears in her eyes, and she shivered.

Barlow, feeling this, said: "You're cold, Gulab. The night wind that comes up from the black muck of the cotton fields and across the river is raw. Hang on for a minute," he added, as he slipped his arm from about her shoulders and fumbled at the back of his saddle. A couple of buckles were unclasped, and he swung loose a warm military cloak and wrapped it about her, his cheek brushing hers as he did so.

Then she was like a bird lying against his chest, closed in from everything but just this *sahib* who was like a god.

A faint perfume lingered in Barlow's nostrils from the contact: it was the perfume of attar, of the true oil of rose, such as only princes use because of its costliness, and he wondered a little.

She saw his eyes looking down into hers, and asked: "What is it, *sahib*—what disturbs you? If it is a question, ask me."

His white teeth gleamed in the moonlight. "Just nothing that a man should bother over—that he should ask a woman about."

But almost involuntarily he brushed his face across her black hair and said, "Just that, Gulab—that it's like burying one's nose in a rose."

"The attar, *sahib?* I love it because it's gentle."

"Ah, that's why you wore the rose that I came by at the *naulch*."

"Yes, *sahib*. Though I am Bootea, because of a passion for the rose I am called Gulab."

"Lovely—the Rose! That's just what you are, Gulab. But the attar is so costly! Are you a princess in disguise?"

"No, *sahib*, but one brought me many bottles of it, the slim, long bottles like a finger; and a drop of it lasts for a moon."

"Ah, I see," and Barlow smiled. "You have for lover a rajah, the one who brought the attar."

The figure in the cloak shivered again, but the girl said nothing. And Barlow, rather to hear her voice, for it was sweet like flute music, chaffed: "What is he like—the one that you love? A swaggering, tall, black-whiskered Rajput, no doubt, with a purple vest embroidered in gold, clanking with *tulwar*, and a voice like a Brahmini bull—full of demand?"

The slim arms about his waist tightened a little—that was all.

"Confess, Gulab. It will pass the time; a love story is sweet, and Brahm, who creates all things, creates flowers beautiful and sweet to stir love," and he shook the small body reassuringly.

"*Sahib*, when a girl dances before the great ones to please, it is permitted that she may play at being a princess to win the favor of a rajah, and sing the love song to the music of the *sitar* (guitar), but it is a matter of shame to speak it alone, to the Presence."

"Tell me, Gulab." His strong fingers swept the smooth black hair.

The girl unclasped her arms from about Barlow's waist and led his fingers to a harsh iron bracelet upon her arm.

At the touch of the cold metal, iron emblem of a child marriage, a shackle never to be removed, he knew that she was a widow, accounted by Brahminical caste an offense to the gods, an outcast, because if the husband still lived she would be in a *zenanna* of gloomy walls, and not one who danced as she had at Nana Sahib's.

"And the man to whom you were bound by your parents died?" he asked.

"I am a widow, *sahib*, as the iron bracelet testifies with cold bitterness; it is the badge of one who is outcast, of one who has not become *sati*, has not sat on the wood to find death in its devouring flame."

Barlow knew all the false logic, the metaphysical Machiavellians, the Brahmins, advanced to thin out the undesirable females —women considered at all times in that land of overpopulation of less value than men—by the simple expedient of self-destruction. He knew the Brahmins' thesis culled from their Word of God, the Vedas or the Puranas, calculated to make the widow a voluntary, willing suicide. They would tell Bootea that, owing to having been evil in former incarnations, her sins had been visited upon her husband, had caused his death; that in a former life she had been a snake, or a rat.

The dead husband's mother, had Bootea come to an age to live with him, though yet but a child of twelve years, would, on the slightest provocation, beat her—even brand her with a hot iron; he had known of it having been done. She would be given but one meal a day—rice and chillis. Even if she had not yet left her father's house he would look upon her as a shameful thing, an undesirable member of the family, one not to be rid of again in the way of marriage; for if a Hindu married her it would break his caste—he would be

a veritable pariah. No servant would serve him; no man would sell him anything; if he kept a shop no one would buy of him; no one would sit and speak with him—he would be ostracized.

The only life possible for the girl would be that of a prostitute. She might be married by the temple priests to the god Khandoka, as thousands of widows had been, and thus become a nun of the temple, a prostitute to the celibate priests. Knowing all this, and that Bootea was what she was, her face and eyes holding all that sweetness and cleanness, that she lived in the guardianship of Ajeet Singh, very much a man, Barlow admired her the more in that she had escaped moral destruction. Her face was the face of one of high caste; she was not like the ordinary *nautch* girl of the fourth caste. Everything about Bootea suggested breeding, quality. The iron bracelet indicated why she had socially passed down the scale—there was no doubt about it.

"I understand, Gulab," he said, "the *sahibs* all understand, and know that widowhood is not a reproach."

"But the *sahib* questioned of love—and how can one such know of love? The heart starves and does not grow, for it feeds upon love—what we of Hind call the sweet pain in the heart."

"But have none been kind, Gulab, pleased by your flower face—has no one warmed your heart?"

The slim arms that gripped Barlow in a new tightening trembled, the face that fled from the betraying moonlight was buried against his tunic, and the warm body quivered from sobs.

Barlow turned her face up, and the moonlight showed vagrant pearls that lay against the olive cheeks, now tinted like the petals of a rose. Then from a service point of view, and as a matter of caste, Barlow went *ghazi*. He drooped his head and let his lips linger against the girl's eyes, and uttered a superb commonplace: "Don't cry, little girl," he said. "I am seven kinds of a brute to bother you!"

And Bootea thought it would have been better if he had driven a knife into her heart, and sobbed with increased bitterness. Once her fingers wandered up searchingly and touched his throat.

Barlow, casting about for the wherefore of his madness, discovered the moonlight, and heard the soft night air whispering through the harp chords of trees that threw a tracery of black lines across the white road; and from a grove of mango trees came the gentle scent of their blossoms; and he remembered that statistics had it that there was but one *memsahib* to so many square miles in that land of expatriation; and he knew that he was young and full of the joy of life; that a British soldier was not like a man of Hind who looked upon women as cattle.

There did not obtrude into his mental retrospect as an accusation against this unwarrantable tenderness the vision of the Resident's daughter—almost his fiancée. Indeed, Elizabeth was the antithesis in physical appeal of the gentle Gulab; the drawing room perhaps, repartee of Damascus steel fineness, tutored polish, class, cold integrity—these things associated admirably with the unsensuous Elizabeth. Thoughts of her, remembrances, had no place in the glamorous, perfumed moonlight.

So he set his teeth and admonished the gray Turkoman, called him the decrepit son of a donkey, being without speed; and to punish him stroked his neck gently; even this forced diversion, bringing him closer to the torturing sweetness of the girl.

But now he was aware of a throbbing on the night wind, and a faint shrill note that lay deep in the shadows beyond. It was a curious rumbling noise, as though ghosts of the hills on the night were playing bowles with rounded rocks. And the shrilling skirl grew louder as if men marched behind bagpipes.

The Gulab heard it, too, and her body stiffened, her head thrust from the enveloping cloak, and her eyes showed like darkened sapphires.

"Carts carrying cotton, perhaps," he said. But presently he knew that small cotton carts but rattled. The volume of rumbling was as if an army moved.

From up the road floated the stacatto note of a staff beating its surface, and the

clanking tinkle of an iron ring against the wooden staff.

"A mail carrier," Barlow said.

And then to the monotonous *pat-pat-pat* of trotting feet the mail carrier emerged from the gray wall of night.

"Here, you, what comes?" the captain queried, checking the gray.

The postie stopped in terror at the English voice.

"Salaam, Bahadur Sahib; it is war."

"Thou art a tree owl," and Barlow laughed. "A war does not spring up like a drift of driven dust. Is it some rajah's elephants and carts with his harem going to a durbar?"

"*Sahib*, it is, as I have said, war. The big brass cannon that is called 'the humbler of cities,' goes forth to speak its order, and with it are sepoys to feed it the food of destruction. Beyond that I know not, *sahib*, for I am a man of peace, being but a runner of the post."

Then he salaamed and sifted into the night gloom like a thrown handful of white sand, echoing back the *clamp—clamp—clamp* of his staff's iron ring, which was a signal to all cobras to move from the path of him who ran, slip their chilled folds from the warm dust of the road.

And on in front what had been sounds of mystery was now a turmoil of noises. The hissing screech, the wails, were the expostulations of tortured axles; the rumbling boom was unexplainable; but the jungle of the hillside was possessed of screaming devils. Black-faced, white-whiskered monkeys, roused by the din, screamed cries of hate and alarm as they scurried in volplaning leaps from tree to tree. And peacocks, awakened when they should have slept, called with their harsh voices from lofty perches.

A party of villagers hurried by, shifting their cheap turbans to hide faces as they hurried along.

The Gulab was trembling; perhaps the deceits, led by Hunsa, had come by a shorter way; for they were like beasts of the jungle in this art of silent, swift travel.

"*Sahib*," she pleaded, "go from the road."

"Why, Bootea?"

"The one with the staff spoke of soldiers."

He laughed and patted her shoulder. "Don't fear, little lady," he said. "An army doesn't make war upon one, even if they are soldiers. It will be but a wedding party who now takes the wife to the village of her husband."

"Not at night; and a *sahib* who carries a woman upon his saddle will hear words of offense."

Though Barlow laughed he was troubled. What if the smoldering fire of sedition had flared up, and that even now men of Sindhia's were slipping on a night march toward some massing of rebels. The resonant, heavy moaning of massive wheels was like the rumble of a gun carriage. And, too, there was the drumming of many hoofs upon the road. Barlow's ear told him it was the rhythmic beat of cavalry horses, not the erratic *rat-a-tat, rat-a-tat* of native ponies.

With a pressure upon the rein he edged the gray from the white road to a fringe of bamboo and date palms, saying: "If you will wait here, Gulab, I'll see what this is all about."

He slipped from the saddle and lifted her gently to the ground, saying: "Don't move. Of a certainty it is nothing but the passing of some rajah. But, if by any chance I don't return, wait until all is still, until all have gone, and then some well-disposed driver of a bullock cart will take you on your way." Putting his hand in his pocket, and drawing it forth, he added: "Here is the compeller of friendship—silver; for a bribe even an enemy will become a friend."

But the Gulab with her slim fingers closed his hand over the rupees, and pressed the back of it against her lips, saying: "If I die it is nothing. But stay here, *sahib*, they may be—"

She stopped, and he asked: "May be whom, Gulab?"

"Men who will harm thee."

But Barlow, lifting to the saddle, passed to the road, and Bootea crumpled down in a little desolate heap of misery, her fingers thrust within her bodice, pleading with an amulet for protection for the *sahib*. She

prayed to her own Village god to breathe mercy into the hearts of those who marched in war, and if it were the Bheels, that Bhowanee would vouchsafe them an omen that to harm the one on a white horse would bring her wrath upon their families and their villages.

Captain Barlow reined in the gray on the roadside, for those that marched were close. Now he could see, two abreast, horses that carried cavalrymen. Ten couples of the troop rode by with low-voiced exchanges of words among themselves. A petty officer rode at their heels, and behind him, on a bay Arab, whose sweated skin glistened like red wine in the moonlight, came a *risildar*, the commander of the troop. A little down the road Barlow could see an undulating, swaying, huge ribbon of white-and-pink bullocks, twenty-four yoke of the tall, lean-flanked, powerful *amrit mahal*, the breed that Hyder Ali long ago had brought on his conquering way to the land of the Mahrattas. And beyond the ghost-like line of white creatures was some huge thing that they drew.

The commander reined his Arab to a stand beside Barlow and saluted, saying: "Salaam, Major Sahib—you ride alone?"

Barlow said: "My salaams, *risildar*, and I am but a captain. I ride at night because the days are hot. My two men have gone before me because my horse dropped a shoe, which had to be replaced. Did the *risildar* see my two servants that were mounted?"

"I met none such," the commander answered. "Perhaps in some village they [illegible] for a drink of liquor; they of [illegible] with this— and he waved a gauntleted hand back toward the thing that loomed beyond the bullocks that had now come to a halt. "It is the brass cannon, the like of which there is no other. We go to the camp of the Amil, who commands the Sindia troops, taking him the brass cannon that it may compel a Mussulman Zemindar to pay the tax that is long past due. Why the barbarian should not pay I know not. For a tax of one-fourth is not much for a foreigner, a debased follower of Mahomet, to render unto the ruler of this land that is the garden of the world. He has but himself and mud up in his mud fort, but when this brass mother of destruction spits into his stronghold a ball or two that is not opium he will come forth or we will enter by the gate the cannon has made."

"Then there will be bloodshed, *risildar*," Barlow declared.

"True, Captain Sahib; but that is, after a manner, the method of collecting just dues in this land where those who till the soil now, were, but a generation or two since, men of the sword—they can't forget the traditions. In the land of the British rajah six inches of a paper, with the big seal duly affixed, would do the business. That I know, for I have traveled far, *sahib*. As to the bloodshed, worse will be the trampling of crops, for in the district of this worshiper of Mahomet the wheat grows like wild scrub in the jungle, taller than up to the belly of my horse. That is the why-fore of the cannon, in a way of speaking, because from a hill we can send to this man a slaying message, and leave the wheat standing to fill the bellies of those who are in his hands as a tyrant. Sirdar Baptiste was for sending a thousand sepoys to put the fear of destruction in the debtor; but the Dewan with his eye on revenue from crops, hit upon this plan of the loud-voiced one of brass."

Then the commander ordered the advance, and saluting, said: "Salaam, Captain Sahib, and if I meet your servants I'll tell them that you desire their presence."

When the huge cannon had rumbled by, and behind it had passed a company of sepoys on foot, Barlow turned his horse into the jungle for Gulab.

CHAPTER XI.

SOLILOQUY OF A FOOL.

BOOTEAS eyes glistened like stars when, lowering a hand, Barlow said: "Put a foot upon mine, Gulab, and I'll swing you up."

When they were on the road she said: "I saw them. It is as the runner said, was it not—is it so, sahib?"

"The captain says that he goes to collect revenue, but it may be that he spoke a lie, for it is said that a man of the land has five ways of telling a tale, and but one of them is the truth, and comes last."

The girl pondered over this for a little, and then asked: "Does the *sahib* think perhaps it is war against his people?"

That was just what was in Barlow's mind since he had seen the big gun going forth at night; that perhaps the plot that was just a whisper, fainter than the hum of a humming bird's wing, was moving with swift, silent velocity.

"Why do you ask that question? Have you heard from lips—perhaps loosened by wine or desire—aught of this?"

When she remained without answer, Barlow tapped his fingers lightly upon her shoulder, saying: "Tell me, girl."

"I have heard nothing of war," she said. "There was a something, though, that men whispered in the dark."

"What was it?"

"It was of the chief of the Pindaris."

She felt the quivering start that ran through Barlow's body, but he said quietly: "With the Pindaris there is always trouble. Something of robbery—of a raid, was it?"

"I will listen again to those that whisper in the dark," she answered, "and perhaps if it concerns you, for your protection, I will tell."

"I hope those men didn't fall in with my two chaps," Barlow said, rather voicing his thoughts than in the way of speaking to the girl.

"The two who rode—they were the Captain Sahib's servants?"

Barlow started. "Yes, they were. I suppose I can trust you."

"And the *sahib* is troubled? Perhaps it was a message for the *sahib* that they carried."

"I don't know," he answered, evasively. "I was thinking that perhaps they might be messengers, for our sepoys are not stationed here, and come but on such errands."

"And if they were killed, and the message stolen, it would cause trouble?"

She felt him tremble as he looked down into her eyes.

"I don't know. But the messages of a raj are not for the ears of men to whom they have not been sent."

Barlow had an intuition that the girl's words were not prompted by idle curiosity. He was possessed of a sudden gloomy impression that she knew something of the two men who rode. And it was strange that they had not been seen upon either of the roads. The officer spoke of them frankly, and not as a man hiding something.

Suddenly he took a firm resolve, perhaps a dangerous one; not dangerous though if his men had really gone through.

"Gulab," he said, and with his hand he turned her face up by the chin till their eyes were closer together, "if the two bore a message for me, and it was stolen, I would be like that one you loved and lost."

The beautiful face swung from his palm and he could hear her gasping.

"You know something?" he said, and he caressed the smooth, black tresses.

"I did not see them, *sahib*."

They rode in silence for half a mile, and then she said: "Perhaps, *sahib*, Bootea can help you—if the message is lost."

"And you will, girl?"

"I will, *sahib;* even if I die for doing it, I will."

His arm tightened about her with a shrub of assuring thankfulness, and she knew that this man trusted her and was not sorry of her burden. Little child dreams floated through her mind that the silver-faced moon would hang there above and light the world forever—for the moon was the soul of the god Purusha whose sacrificed body had created the world—and that she would ride forever in the arms of this fair-faced god, and that they were both of one caste, the caste that had as mark the sweet pain in the heart.

And Barlow was sometimes dropping the troubled thought of the missing order and the turmoil that would be in the council of the Governor General when it became known, to mutter inwardly: "By Jove! If the chaps get wind of this, that I carried the Gulab throughout a moonlit night, there'll be nothing for me but to send in my papers. I'll be drawn—my leg'll be pulled." And he reflected bitterly that

nothing on earth, no protestation, no swearing by the gods would make it believed as being what it was. He chuckled once, picturing the face of the immaculate Elizabeth while she thrust into him a bodkin of moral autopsy, should she come to know of it.

Bootea thought he had sighed, and laying her slim fingers against his neck, said: "The *sahib* is troubled."

"I don't care a damn!" Barlow exclaimed in English, his mind still on the personal trail.

Seeing that she, not understanding, had taken the sharp tone as a rebuke, he said: "If I had been alone, Gulab, I'd have been troubled sorely, but perhaps the gods have sent you to help out."

"Ah, yes, God pulled our paths together. And if Bootea is but a sacrifice that will be a favor, she is happy."

If the girl had been of a white race, in her abandon of love she would have laid her lips against his, but the women of Hind do not kiss.

The big plate of burnished silver slid, as if pushed by celestial fingers, across the azure dome toward the gloomed walls of the Ghats that it would cross to dip into the sea, the Indian Ocean, and mile upon mile was picked from the front and laid behind by the gray as he strode with untiring swing toward his bed that waited on the high plateau of Poona.

The two riders felt rather sleepy—the Gulab warm and happy, cuddled in the protecting cloak, and Barlow grim, oppressed by fatigue and the mental strain of feared disaster. Now the muscles of the horse rippled in heavier toil, and his hoofs beat the earth in slower strides, the way was rising from the plain as it approached the plateau that was like an immense shelf let into the wall of the world above the lowland: a shelf that held jewels, topaz, and diamonds, that glinted their red and yellow lights, and upon which rested giant pearls, the moonlight silvering the domes and minarets of white palaces and mosques of Poona. The dark hill upon which rested the Temple of Parvati threw its black outline against the sky, and like a burnished helmet glowed the golden dome beneath which sat the disaster goddess. At their feet, strung out between forbidding banks of clay and sand, ran a molten stream of silver, the sleepy waters of the Mula.

"By Jove!" said Barlow, suddenly cognizant that he had practically arrived at the end of his ride, that the windmill of Don Quixote stood yonder on the hill, realized that in a sense, so far as Bootea was concerned, he had just drifted. Now he asked: "I'm afraid, little girl, your *sahib* is somewhat of a fool, for I have not asked where you want me to take you."

"Yonder, *sahib*," and her eyes were turned toward the jeweled hill.

As they rose to the hilltop that was a slap of rock and sand carrying a city, he asked: "Where shall I put you down that will be near your place of rest, your friends?"

"Is there a *memsahib* in the home of the *sahib?*" she asked.

"No, Bootea, not so lucky—nobody but servants."

"Then I will go to the bungalow of the *sahib*."

"Confusion!" he exclaimed in moral trepidation.

Bootea's hand touched his arm, and she turned her face inward to hide the hot flush that lay upon it. "No, *sahib*, not because of Bootea; one does not sleep in the lap of a god."

"All right, girl," he answered. "Sorry."

As the gray plodded tiredly down the avenue of trees, a smooth road bordered by a hedge of cactus and lanten, Barlow turned him to the right up a drive of broken stone, and dropping to the ground at the veranda of a white-walled bungalow, lifted the girl down, saying: "Within it can be arranged for a rest place for you."

A *chowkidar*, lean, like a mummified mendicant, rose up from a squeaking, roped charpoy and salaamed.

"Take the horse to the stable, Jungwa, and tell the *syce* to undress him. Remember to keep that monkey tongue of yours between your teeth, for in my room hangs a bitter whip. It is a lie that I have not ridden home alone," Barlow commanded.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Royce Assists

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

"Oh! The mech, he blamed the pilot
And the pilot blamed the ship,
But the reason for that crack-up
Wasn't water on the hip!"—

WARBLED Royce Grainger, beating time with much energy and some rhythm on the agitated shoulder of Bill McClellan. "Chorus, Bill! Nip! Stunt! Slip! Crash! A-a-a-ambulance!"

"Shut up!" commanded Bill emphatically. "Your sneaking insinuation is as unjust as it is unmusical."

Flip Devans, Royce's mechanic, had been tinkering with the motor of a stunted scout plane on the line a hundred feet from the hangar when the first note of the song assailed his ears. He pushed an anxious and breathless countenance into the building where the two friends were standing just in time to encounter the red eyes of Bill.

"Somebody crash?" Royce asked him blandly.

"I guess not," Flip retorted after looking over his superior with great care. He removed himself with some deliberation from the fiery gaze of Bill.

"My motor has made me deaf often enough, but this is the first time it has made me hear strange things," Royce said, pulling off his helmet and presenting an attentive ear to the younger man. "If you aren't—er—hipped, rave through it again, will you?"

"It's infernally serious," Bill declared, transferring his glare from the place where Flip had been to a bit of rubber hose on the oily floor. He kicked it across the shed and watched it bounce to rest before proceeding. "What a woman wants, she gets. Well, I'm it. This girl is a nice little girl—fine family, lots of money and so forth—but she has taken a few things I said too seriously. I'll be engaged in a week. I'm afraid it will be a deuced short engagement, too. Do you think I'd ask your help if I wasn't desperate?"

Royce blinked.

"I have a reason, an important reason, for climbing out of this affair now," McClellan continued. "If—"

"Go on," Royce urged. "I heard all this before, but I want to see if I hear it again."

"This girl wants me because she thinks aviators are heroes. She doesn't like me because I have blue eyes, an ear for jazz, a charming personality, an admiration for Stevenson, a fairly decent job, or anything like that. No. She likes me because I'm a hero. Ugh! Imagine being a hero before breakfast—or after dinner. Imagine being heroic three hundred and sixty-five days a year. Besides, I have an important—Well, if I can get her over thinking I'm a hero it's all off."

"You want to reveal to her your real self?" Royce asked sympathetically.

"I desire to delude her into the belief that I am a coward and a braggart," Bill said at last, with some repression.

"And you need help?" the pilot inquired, allowing a generous amount of incredulity to tinge his tone.

"I do," retorted McClellan fiercely. "And I'm liable to prove the first part right now by manhandling such an insignificant, rabbit-faced symptom of a neurasthenic kiwi as yourself!"

"Which part?" Royce said with an appreciative grin. "Throttle down, Bill. I was just probing to discover just how badly off you think you are."

McClellan subsided, although his feet continued to harass small objects on the floor.

"I shall be pleased to coöperate with you for the lady's sake—I think," Royce resumed blandly. "Is the subject in question familiar with your war record and subsequent aëronautical career?"

McClellan made vague, explanatory motions with hands while his face assumed a brickish hue.

"She's a good listener," he muttered after a pause. "I [illegible] something of it to leak out."

"Like gasoline out of a cheesecloth tank," Royce deduced. "Ah, well! When I was young, two or three years ago, I, too, experienced difficulty in keeping beautiful ladies in the dark concerning my remarkable ability and thrilling exploits."

The hue on Bill's face deepened to purple, as sunset fades into night. He opened his mouth, then shut it again; took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead. Royce watched him attentively, as one studies a bug, but relented sufficiently to inquire:

"Well, how are we going to show you up?"

"I'll bring her out here to the field," McClellan burst out eagerly, restoring his handkerchief with unnecessary violence. "You take us up in that four-seated Flamingo. We'll sit in the front cockpit; you alone in the back. Then start stunting; a few loops, nose dive, spin—anything you think the old crate will stand. I'll be normal enough until you cut loose the works. Then I'll become terrified—scream, shout, hang onto the sides, and beg you to stop stunting. You stop and come down. Insult me as I scramble with quivering legs to the ground. Make it strong. You're safe. Then take the girl aside and tell her that although I was in the air service, I had to be grounded for cowardice. She'll never speak to me again."

"Suppose she faints or something when the stunts start?" Royce objected. "You never know how a girl is going to take that sort of thing."

"She's been up and through it all, I know," Bill answered.

"I'll take the matter under advisement," Royce decided weightily.

"You'll do more than that," Bill McClellan declared confidently. "I'll bring her down Thursday. And Royce, watch your step! The lady is apt to mistake you for a hero, too, after my demonstration of incapacity."

"It wouldn't be a mistake, Bill," Royce answered modestly.

"There was a conscience—a fairly well-oiled conscience—inside the vigorous frame of Royce Grainger. This undesirable instrument pricked him occasionally as he thought of the scheme. Bill McClellan, he knew, was a bit of a Lothario, and a fickle Lothario at that. Nevertheless, he was an old squadron mate, and ties formed in the

air are not easily disregarded on the ground. Besides, if some man-hunting female had entrapped the susceptible Bill, it was clearly his duty to stand by his sex and haul his fellow man out of the deadfall.

That was as far as Royce got with the affair. A test pilot on a busy field has little time for indulging in moral conflict. And Royce was then engaged in the dangerous task of trying out a scout plane that flew at the heavenly rate of one hundred and eighty miles an hour, but could only be landed at the hellish rate of eighty-five.

Thursday arrived, despite his absorption. Royce, scrambling for words, found himself being introduced by Bill to an altogether indescribable young lady. Her very handclasp and smile warmed his heart despite his efforts to gaze upon her icily, as a mere object which was to be stunted vigorously and fooled outrageously.

While he fought to conceal from her by words the fact that he liked her from the top of her pretty little turban to the small soles of her shoes, resentment against Bill McClellan surged upward within him. So this blue-eyed, angel-faced little girl was the unscrupulous vampire Bill claimed had entrapped him. And here was Bill himself beside her belying his words by holding her arm, by smiling down upon her with a most offensive air of proprietorship, and in other delicate but obvious ways assuring her that all he desired in life was that she would be his. How else could any girl interpret his manner?

With mounting indignation Royce discarded the nefarious scheme of Bill McClellan. He would do nothing that would hurt to the heart this gentle, pretty stranger with the soft voice. In fact—Royce threw a murderous glance at the monstrous Bill—he would be her ally. If she wanted so worthless a thing as Bill McClellan for a husband she should have him. Here his thought was halted by the voice of the plotter.

"I think we had better look over the ship together, Royce," Bill, the ingrate, said, making horrible faces and stealthy gestures Royce interpreted as a desire for a secret talk. "Do you mind our leaving you for just a moment, Millicent?"

"I've tried out the controls," Royce answered, gazing coldly at the frantic signals. "You take a look at the guys. Go ahead! See if they'd stand a little more tightening."

Bill went, somewhat puzzled, and even more sulky. Millicent, with a look in her eye that renewed Royce's anger, watched him walk to the machine in the hangar.

"He's a good flier, too, isn't he?" the girl asked softly.

"He is," Royce answered violently and treacherously.

"Oh!" said the girl, smiling gratefully but briefly up at him.

"The pup!" said Royce grimly to himself. "She's too good for him."

He waited silently, wrinkling the corners of his eyes over the problem of delivering into her hands the scapegrace person of Bill McClellan.

Bill came back in an incredibly short time.

"Everything O. K.," he reported, and they waited while mechanics trundled the big machine out of its shed.

Royce looked on morosely as Bill, with great care, got the girl into a leather coat, and even went so far as to fasten the leather thong of her helmet under her chin, a thing Royce had contemplated doing himself.

"The conceited pup!" he muttered. "Thinks she wants him, so he's trying to wriggle away, is he? I'll fix him! But how?"

Bill made an attempt to talk to Royce behind the girl's back, but the pilot ignored him. Royce explained at great length to Millicent the excellencies of the Flamingo. He showed her everything, including the rear cockpit in which he was to sit alone.

"How would you like to ride back here?" he said to the girl. "The machine has a dual control system so that either of the two seated in the rear cockpit can take control. I'll let you hold the stick when we're up high enough."

"No, I think our original plan is better," Bill interfered hastily. "And Royce! Don't stunt. I mean it."

Royce snorted indignantly at this last bit of acting. Millicent was handed carefully to the front cockpit by Bill. Royce

looked over his passengers' safety belts and then clambered into one of the two seats in the rear cockpit. Flip Devans came to the propeller and waited for the "Switch off!" of the pilot.

"Wait a minute," said Royce suddenly, and clambered out of the cockpit. His two passengers looked after him, the girl curiously and Bill suspiciously. Royce trotted to the hangar, slung his own clear glass goggles on a shelf, and picked up a pair with lenses tinted amber. He put them on and looked at his eyes in a broken mirror. Then he half closed his lids and looked again. After this cryptic performance he chuckled, venting a noise like a rusty saw biting into a box.

"This is altruism," he assured the broken mirror solemnly, "but she wants him."

He hurried back to the plane, wearing the tinted goggles, and vaulted into his place without comment.

"Don't stunt, Royce," Bill said again.

"Huh," said Royce. "Switch off! Contact!"

The Flamingo waddled forward like a duck—a duck who was masticating dynamite—quickened its pace and leaped across the field like a grayhound, and rose into the air like an eagle. The motor, biting savagely into its hearty meal of high-test gasoline, and purring like a contented dinosaur, swung them ten thousand feet into the air in twenty minutes. In the front cockpit Bill pointed and shouted in unmannerly fashion as he showed Millicent the Sound, the ocean, the skyscrapers of Manhattan, outlined against a leaden horizon, and the other sights of the great bowl in which they were suspended. Occasionally one or the other would glance back at the pilot, but all they could see was a resolute chin, slitted mouth, and a lean nose which attended strictly to the business of supporting the amber-tinted goggles.

Royce was flying in great circles, of which the irregular patch of green aëro-drome was the center. Royce continued the upward climbing turn of the machine far beyond the lowest height at which stunting was reasonably safe. Bill McClellan turned and looked at him intently, shaking his head violently and framing words with his mouth; but the pilot made no answering sign.

Only once during the long upward climb did Royce's tightly closed mouth relax into a grin. That was after a final inspection of the altimeter and a glance over the side.

"Wants her to think he's a coward, does he?" Royce confided to the eighty-mile air current that was buffeting his head. "I'll show him, and her, too!"

His left hand suddenly snapped out to the instrument board and switched off the motor while his right hand pushed the control stick forward. Instantly the plane headed earthward in a dangerously steep glide. At the moment the Flamingo nosed downward, Royce collapsed, with his head and shoulders over the side of the cockpit. His left hand dangled outside the body, while his right, equally motionless, remained inside the cockpit. Hidden from Bill and the girl in front, his right hand firmly gripped the stick; and his feet, also invisible, remained as firmly planted on the rudder bar.

As the roar of the motor suddenly ceased, and the hum of the taut wires between the wings rose to take its place, Bill and the girl turned backward. They saw the pilot limp and half out of the plane. And even as their horrified eyes saw, the hum of the wires became a low whistle which ran steadily up the scale as the speed of the rush toward earth increased.

Through half-closed eyes, screened from view by the amber lenses, Royce saw the fright on the two faces peering backward and upward at him. Then he saw Bill's mouth snap shut and his shoulders heave as he undid his safety belt. Bill shouted a word of encouragement to the girl. Then he pulled himself to his feet and paused for a moment, looking, with a very white face, upward at the other cockpit wherein was the inert pilot and the controls which alone could save all three from death.

It was a scant four feet away, but the fuselage between was smooth and without hand-holds, the pitch was steep, and the plane was liable at any moment to change its glide to an erratic, fluttering fall. And below the unpiloted machine was two miles

of clear space. That was the way the brain behind the white face analyzed the situation, Royce knew.

The pause was a slight one. After a quick glance over the side at the field, Bill started with clutching arms and legs up the steep slope. As he did, Royce, his eyes somewhat anxiously on his friend, pulled the stick back a little, making the climb less steep. Through the amber glasses he watched. Inch by inch, arms and knees and feet gripping the broad, curving frame, Bill edged his way. Halfway; and then one of his arms shot out and gripped the edge of the rear cockpit. With a pull and a wriggle he pulled himself head first into the cockpit and writhed into place. Like a lunging snake his feet and hand shot to their places on the duplicate controls.

Then his eyes suddenly fell on the strong right hand of Royce gripping the other stick.

"Why, you—" Bill shrieked; but the words were swept instantly away from the diving plane.

Royce shoved his stick sidewise to make the plane bank and fling his relaxed head and shoulders back into the cockpit. As soon as he had collapsed—artistically—out of sight of the girl, he turned, grinned amiably upward at his angry friend and relinquished control of the plane.

Bill McClellan, splitting his attention three ways among reassuring nods to the girl, animated remarks to Royce, and steady control of the Flamingo, spiraled gently downward. Royce, carefully keeping under cover, lit a cigarette, took a few puffs, and then pulled a pencil and an envelope from the pocket of his coat.

"If you tell her it's faked I'll say you're concealing your heroism," he scrawled. "I'm pro-girl, you tarantula."

He held this composition up to Bill and then restored it to his pocket. Bill surveyed it fiercely, and then turned his whole attention to the plane, now coming in over the hangars. He set the Flamingo's stout wheels and tailskid on the greensward with unnecessary emphasis, while Royce promptly resumed unconsciousness. The pilot was still in a large, inanimate heap when the plane trundled to the hangar and stopped.

"Oh, Bill!" Millicent said in the sudden stillness. The tone in which she said it caused an irrepressible quiver to run through the stubbornly unconscious frame of Royce Grainger. Bill, with much unnecessary violence, and some assistance from the mystified Flip, hauled the pilot out of the rear cockpit and let him trickle to the ground. Royce decided that it was time to come to.

"Where am I?" he murmured, opening one eye cautiously.

"The poor man!" said Millicent, bending over him with so much tenderness that Royce felt well rewarded for his duplicity.

"I—I must have fainted," Royce said, sitting up feebly and looking around. Flip Devans, after a single glance, made a queer sound and disappeared into the darker recesses of the hangar.

"You did," said Bill McClellan sullenly.

"In the air?" asked Royce, with horror in his voice.

"In the air," Bill corroborated savagely.

"Bill, you saved my life—you must have saved my life, I mean," Royce declared, solemnly and weakly holding out his hand.

"And he saved yours, too," he added, as if by afterthought, turning to the girl.

"He's the bravest man I ever met, and the most modest."

"I think so, too," the girl said softly.

A bad fit of coughing came to Royce at that moment, and, feebly excusing himself, he staggered away. But as he tottered he muttered: "Now let's see you break away, Bill, you philanderer. You're as good as married now."

After watching Bill and the girl drive away, Flip Devans scratched his right ear for ten minutes with negligible results.

That night at 1 A.M., in the little cottage near the field where Royce spent his sleeping hours, the telephone jangled with that imperative jangle reserved for the small hours. Royce, sleepily endeavoring to recall some of the new words Bill McClellan had shouted at him in the rear cockpit, answered it.

"Royce, old scout, I want to thank you," the man on the other end of the wire exclaimed excitedly.

"What for?" Royce asked suspiciously,

when he had identified the voice as that of Bill himself.

"For fainting! Even if you did frighten her. You did it. She's accepted me," Bill raved happily. "Just a few hours ago. I had to tell you right away."

"What are you thanking me for?" Royce said crossly. "Weren't you trying to climb out of it?"

"Climb out of it! With Millicent! No, you iguana. She's the reason why I wanted to get rid of the other one."

"What other one?" asked Royce, ungluing an eye in somnolent semi-surprise.

"The one that was on my trail. That one eloped with a submarine lieutenant on Tuesday. She thought he was so heroic. The vamp! I tried to tell you this was the other girl, but you wouldn't give me a chance."

"What other girl?" Royce persisted sleepily.

"The girl," Bill answered promptly.

"Then — but — what — why—Bill, you call me up again some time or send me a diagram. I congratulate you anyhow, and commiserate the lady. 'D-night."

Royce stood for a moment looking at the silenced telephone as his faculties dimly wrestled with the news. Then he chuckled, venting a noise like a rusty saw biting into a box.

"It was altruism, all right," he assured the telephone, sighed an inexplicable sigh after the manner of bachelors on such occasions, and went back to bed.

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TO-DAY

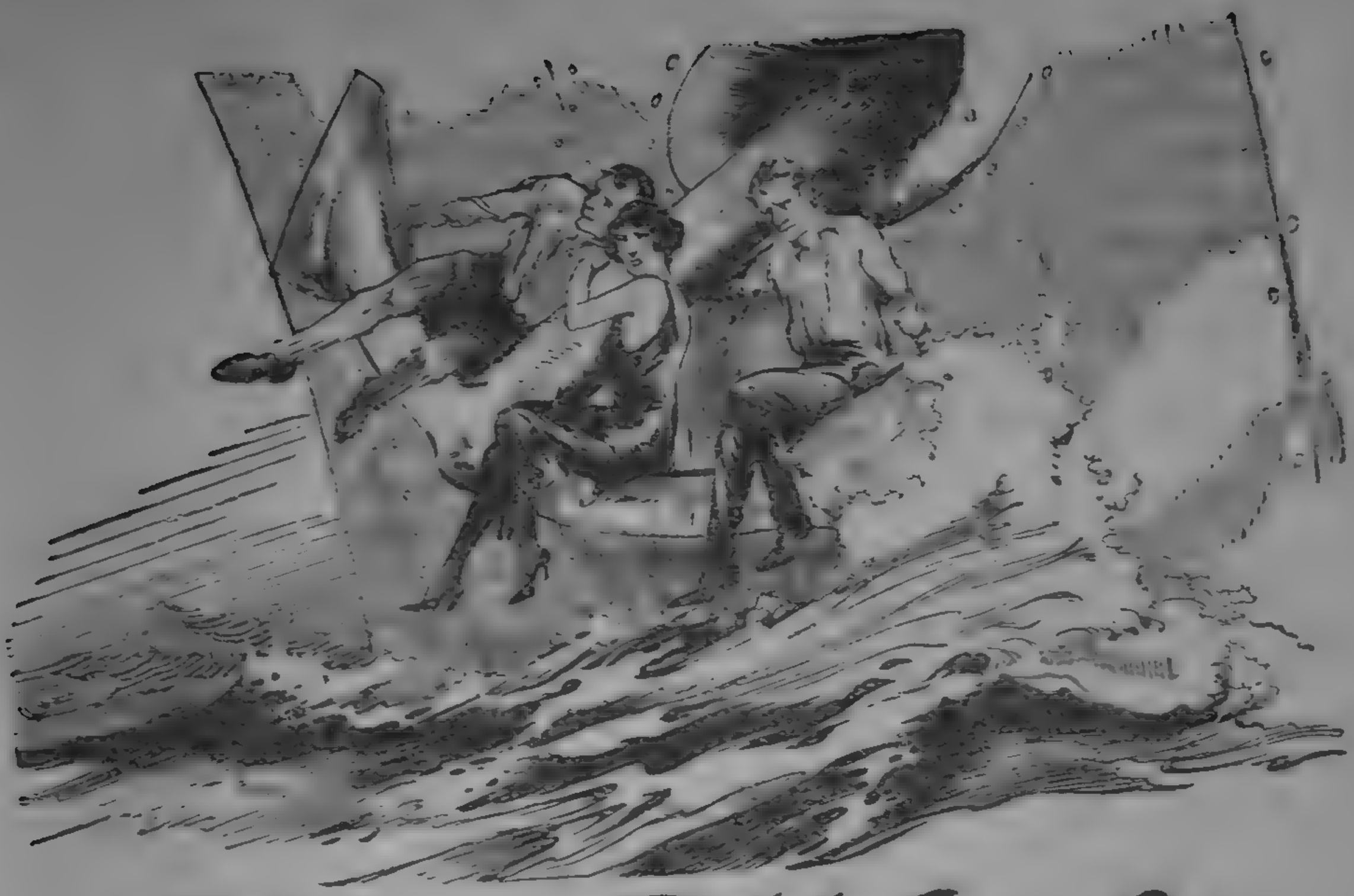
I HAVE such flowers of truth for you,
Dear one, as you like best,
And Memory's patient fingers keep
For me—the withered—rest;

I sort my words as vendors do
Their blossoms, bright and dull,
That when you come within my room
Life shall be colorful;

For you—gay speech, my dreams of gold
When skies have opened blue—
But Memory holds some faded hours
I will not give to you.

You come—you go—I wear your kiss,
You smiled at Love's demands:
Oh, Memory, why not throw away
Those dead things in your hands?

Edith Livingston Smith.



Dirty Weather

By RUFUS F. KING

CHAPTER XX.

THE MEETING.

HENDRIKS entered his cabin and faced Fang Wu.

"Well," Hendriks said, "let us lay our cards on the table."

Fang Wu smiled.

"All of them, Captain Hendriks? That will hardly be necessary—for me. I shall merely expose a few, none of which shall be, properly speaking, a trump."

"Where have you got Miss MacTavern?"

Fang Wu smiled again, shrugged, and laughed a little.

"Ah, you Americans, I might even say all you white men! You are so naïve, so patently ingenuous!"

He grinned fatuously. "She is very near you. Your children, I believe, play a game in which one of them is blindfolded and gropes about for the object of his search. As the object is approached, the others cry, 'you are getting warm!' Captain, you are warm, very warm, but in this game it is not you, the searcher, who will be blindfolded, but Miss MacTavern, the searched. If"—his voice snapped to a thin, metallic twang—"if you raise one finger against me, if you make one step in any direction other than that which I shall dictate to you, that girl will be blinded for life!"

Hendriks stood irresolute.

Fang Wu continued:

"Think of my power, what I have done aboard your ship from the time when that girl managed to evade my vigilance for a single moment and managed to get that note on deck! Working with absolute smoothness and precision, I, and my agents, have disorganized your ship, demoralized

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 7.

your crew, sent out such wireless messages as we desired, and I am sure you will agree with me, effectively arranged matters so that you were unable to send out any in turn. It was such a pity to break up the set! It was such a pretty set. But then there is, after all, a certain, subtle pleasure, sensation—atavistic if you wish—in destroying beautiful things, don't you think?"

Hendriks glared on in silence. Fang Wu smiled.

"You are so typical of your race, captain. You refuse to be led away from the point at issue, led away into pleasant bypaths of conjecture. I have a passion for bypaths. They always appeal to me as being so pertinent. Let me see. Where were we? Signals? Ah, yes—that green flare, lovely color, and that black flag with the yellow crosses. Both were in the nature of successful feathers for our bonnet.

"And such a simple matter to remove the fuses so that we might work in darkness, and to later cut the circuits. You will pardon my splitting the infinitive. It is one of my little vices. And it would have been such a simple matter to have prevented us—if, as I have said, your crew were not demoralized.

"As to that trifling dash of poison in the food, I really have Mr. Rutledge to thank for the prevention of what might have turned out to be a rather fatal blow to us. I refer to the fact that some of that food was offered to Miss MacTavern. I was really in rather of a quiver as to the outcome. I shall arrange a suitable offering of joss for the soul of that cat when I shall arrive in China. I have made a note of it. The food was, of course, intended for the rest of you. It seemed expedient that—well, that you should not be so many, especially as Miss MacTavern was then under your guardianship. Now that the delight of her society has again been bestowed upon us the poison is a non-essential. There are—other things.

"Finally, my dear Captain Hendriks, it pleases me to inform you that we are entrenched in various strategic points about the boat, from which your men will be shot down like rats if they attempt to dislodge us, and from which we shall issue forth when I so desire, to do the things I shall desire to do.

"You are the master of this vessel?" Fang Wu laughed softly, derisively. "You have no more authority on board here than one of your wipers in the engine room." He drew himself up to his full height. "I am master here!"

The taunt was too much for human endurance, certainly too much for a ship's master's endurance, and that on his own ship. Hendriks leaped for him. Fang Wu drew in his breath with a sharp hiss and dexterously stepped to one side.

From the adjoining cabin came a scream of terror, a scream that stopped Hendriks dead in his tracks just as he gathered himself for another spring.

"You see?" Fang Wu smiled pleasantly.

"I see!"

Hendriks sank dejectedly into a chair. "Well, what is it you want me to do?"

"That is better." Fang Wu also sat down. "Now we shall be able to talk."

Harris burst dramatically in through the doorway, hero-being bent. An alluring vision, following instantly upon the scream, had flashed upon him, a vision in which he gallantly bore the heiress to many, many millions off to safety, and to undying glory for himself—the whole affair being pleasantly gilded by a haunting tinkle of future wedding bells.

Just how or where he was going to bear her failed to take definite shape in his vision. No matter. Duty had called, shrieked, in fact, and duty would not find him lacking. Having brought his cyclonic entrance to a teetering stop, he looked for the heiress. Nary an heiress. Could those devilish Celestials, guzzling nectar up Olympus-way be mocking him again?

"I heard a scream!"

Harris had just caught himself in time from shouting: "Where's the heiress?"

"Stop, Mr. Harris! Don't come in. Return to your post, please. There has been no sign yet from the other vessel?"

Ye gods, his post! The other vessel be damned. As for himself, might he, Harris, be stricken irrevocably pink.

"No, sir, none as yet. Mr. MacDonald is watching."

"He will let me know?"

"Yes, sir, immediately."

"Thank you. That will be all, Mr. Harris."

Harris went. Bilked again! He was never so near becoming an agnostic as he was at that moment.

"What is this sign you speak about, captain?"

Fang Wu flickered his eyes at Hendriks.

"Sign? No sign—just any sign of Mr. Rutledge's return."

"Do not expect that sign, Captain Hendriks. Mr. Rutledge will not return."

"You don't know Rutledge."

"But I know—other things."

"Then that boat is the one you sent that message to!"

"Perhaps."

"You would have me believe so, anyway. It's to your advantage to have me believe so."

"My dear captain, if there were a friendly armada around you, still what could you do?" He pointed, significantly, toward the adjacent cabin. Hendriks sat silent. "You white men are so, shall we say, heroic, romantically heroic, when it is a question of a woman. You go to such never-ending lengths of sacrifice. A dangerous trait in any race. A trait detrimental to the perfect advancement of any race!"

"A trait I thank God for, I'm proud of—a trait any man of us would die for, sir!"

"That is one direction in which I cannot possibly prevent you from following your inclinations. Kindly call your other two officers in here with you."

"They shall not leave their posts!"

"Do as I say or—" Fang Wu shrugged. "Blindness, dear captain, is only one of the lesser terrors I have up my sleeve."

Hendriks crossed to the door and called below.

"Mr. Harris, come up here, please."

A much resigned and gloomy Harris came into the cabin. MacDonald burst in on his heels.

"He's given the sign, sir!" MacDonald shouted. "They aren't armed. We're to resist at all costs!"

Fang Wu stood beside an open porthole, smiling at them. He took the white handkerchief from the breast pocket of his coat and fluttered it three times, outside the port.

"I wouldn't advise moving, gentlemen," Fang Wu said quietly, "not so much as an inch. Look behind you!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GREAT ADVENTURE.

SPARKS, after Rutledge had mounted to the bridge of the Yung Swei, and the three Chinamen had left him alone to his own devices, took a careful and minute survey of his surroundings—very much *à la* Ernest Montague de Beauprix in "For His Country's Honor." His royal blue funk of the night before had completely departed with daylight, leaving him cool, calm and collected, which was the perpetual state of the aforementioned Ernest M. de B.

To get to the wireless shack, technically dubbed his objective, he would have to walk aft through one of the passageways amidships and would then, undoubtedly, find a ladder leading up to the deck on which the shack was situated. Or he could gain that deck by mounting to the main deck, standing on its railing, and hoisting himself up onto the deck above—providing no one were looking.

This latter alternative would further give him the advantage, an advantage heavily underlined by Ernest, of surprise, the wireless operator of the Yung Swei being the proposed recipient of the surprise, for if the operator happened to be in the shack he would not be looking for anyone to approach it from the rear. Any other method of procedure would be treason to Ernest, so he decided to take the chance, the chance of not being seen.

He adopted a highly *degagé* air and proceeded to stroll carelessly about the well deck. As no prying eyes seemed to be peering out at him from any corner, he took his *degagé* air by the hand and led it gently up the ladder to the main deck, where he promptly dropped it like a hot coal and scrambled nimbly, via the railing, onto the deck above.

For the "rolling hills of fair Lorraine, a background for the grim château that towered, *et cetera*," he substituted as his terrain the flat deck of the Yung Swei and the iron ventilators fastened onto it. All was serene. He loped on all fours aft to the shack. Ernest would not have been flattered. He edged toward a porthole in it and permitted one eye to peer within. The stack of the Yung Swei concealed him from any observing eyes forward.

He ruthlessly discarded Ernest for the nonce and, in a most professional manner, sized up the arrangement of the wireless set. The transmitter was an American Marconi 2 K. W.; the tuner a simple one of the 106 type. So far, at least, his path was strewn with roses.

It was a relief to him not to find some unusual Chinese mechanism that he would have to puzzle out. Furthermore, the storage batteries were in the shack itself, and the fact that there was no emergency spark induction coil clearly indicated that the main set itself could be, and probably was accustomed to being operated from the storage batteries direct. Such being the case, they could not cut off his power.

He resurrected Ernest and they examined the operator himself. He was a small, emaciated Chinaman, the phones on his ears, sitting by the operating desk, listening in.

Sparks smiled. Before drawing his sword, mentally, and stalking the villain, he considered the possibilities for defending the shack against attack. There were two doors. One opened into the bunk room, and the other one, in the after end of the shack, opened on deck.

There were four ports. They were of the usual thick glass and would resist breaking for a moment, a moment that might—must—last long enough to get off that tremendous message on which everything, the very existence of the whole world, as it seemed to him, depended. After that it didn't matter. Nothing mattered. He had a revolver and a pocketful of cartridges. The bulkheads of the shack were of steel. He could hold it against the whole crew—he and Ernest.

He went around the shack, in his very best stalking manner, and paused in the open doorway. It was over in an instant. Before the operator of the Yung Swei could strangle out a single startled yelp, the headpiece and phones had been snatched, by invisible hands, from his head and deposited on the desk; an arm had encircled his throat and was doing its best to put a permanent wave in his windpipe.

He then found himself being unceremoniously dragged into the bunk room, where a wild-eyed, young, white maniac menaced him with a purposeful looking revolver, and securely bound him hand and foot with rubber covered wire.

The maniac next gagged him with one of his own bath towels, and slung him face downward on his own bunk, all to the tune of various hissed fragmentary sentences, such as: "Aha, gr-r-r, zee surprise, *marsewer, zee sacre*—take *zat* and that! you yellow puttied—" and so forth.

This trifle completed, Sparks closed and bolted all the ports in the bunk room. The only door leading from it was the one into the operating room. He pursued the same tactics in there, bolting all the ports and locking the door leading onto the deck. As a final precaution he locked the connecting door between the two rooms.

The stage was set.

He put the headpiece on and tested the sensitivity of the crystal detector with the buzzer. Except for a few atmospherics everything was quiet. He threw the switch on the charging panel to "discharge" and, closing the switches to the "D. C." and "A. C." circuits, pressed the button that operated the automatic starter. When the generator had attained normal speed he threw the "changeover" switch into the sending position, and pressed the transmitting key.

The aërial ammeter registered a radiation of over fourteen amperes, enough—it still being early morning, scarcely past daybreak—to radiate a distance of about a thousand miles. Finally, he placed the loaded revolver on the desk near the key, and started to send.

There were only two things they could do now to stop him. One was to shoot him dead. The other was to cut the aërial leads or lower the aërial to the deck. He doubted

whether any one would risk doing that while he continued to send. The risk of death from the shock of the radiated voltage was too great. Also there was the psychological fear of the layman for electricity.

He decided, however, not to stop, just to keep on sending until the first of the two possibilities should come to pass. Ah, Ernest Montague de Beauprix, you would find your disciple no oil can when it came to the final test!

Charles Lester Pendery, commonly known as "Peanut," electrician second class, U. S. Navy, radio operator on watch on the destroyer, the U. S. S. Western State, idly copied down on the pad lying before him on the operating desk, "CQ-CQ-CQ-CQ-CQ—"

"Here's a ham sending out a ton of 'CQs'," he snorted to Muggins, another operator sitting near him—"CQ" being the international conventional signal standing for "general inquiry call," commonly used when the sender desires any or all stations who hear him, to copy.

"CQ-CQ-CQ-CQ-SOS-SOS-SOS—"

"Oh, boy!" Peanut became tensely efficient. "It's an 'SOS'!"

"SOS-SOS-SOS! Any ship—preferably any navy ship come to our help at full speed approximate position at noon yesterday was thirty nine forty six north one seventy sixteen west?"—the use of the question mark signifies a repeat—"thirty nine forty six north one seventy sixteen west course two seventy true speed nine? Course two seventy true speed nine S S China Queen? SS China Queen mutiny on board and about to be attacked by Chinese ship Yung Swei? Yung Swei cause of mutiny and attack kidnaped jane found in hold China Queen name Mary MacTavern? Mary MacTavern daughter of Clinton MacTavern? Clin . . . . "—a series of dots—". . . .A S . . . . A S . . . ."—"A S" is the signal to wait—". . . . A S . . . They have discovered me I am in radio shack of Yung-Swei . . . China Queen set smashed by man with scar who . . . They are breaking in ports . . . . glass smashed in . . . . "—the sending became irregular—". . . . . Hurry help . . . Latitude 3 9 4 6 N longitude 1 7 0 1 6 W course 2 7 0 true speed 9 latitude 3 9 4 6 N long—" Silence.

"Cause of mutiny and attack kidnaped jane found in hold of China Queen"—Sparks continued sending, his eyes roving continuously from one port to another. Everything was still safe—"Name Mary MacTavern? Mary MacTavern daughter"—some one rattled the knob of the door of the shack, then pounded on it. It had come at last. It was almost a relief. He continued, evenly—"of Clinton MacTavern? Clin—" A face, a puzzled face, peered in at him through cupped hands pressed against a porthole; a face that changed its expression from bewilderment to amazement, to alarm—

". . . A S . . . . A S . . . ."

It was impossible to concentrate with that face staring at him. He could fix his mind upon no definite thing to send. Ernest M. de B. wasn't of the slightest help in the world. The face disappeared. ". . . A S . . . They have discovered me I am in radio shack of Yung Swei . . . . China Queen set smashed by man with scar who—" The face reappeared for an instant. A fine ax crashed against the glass of the port. Sparks shifted his left hand to the transmitting key and picked up the revolver in his right. "They are breaking in ports—" A second blow from the ax splintered the glass.

If he fired his revolver the sound of the shot would bring the whole crew about his ears. This he did not want—yet. He was possessed with the fixed idea that he must keep on sending, that there was something that had been omitted, or something to be added to the message. ". . . . Glass smashed in . . . "—his sending became irregular—". . . . Hurry help . . . " He covered the enraged face peering at him with his revolver. The face instantly ducked—". . . Latitude 3 9 4 6 N longitude 1 7 0 1 6 W course 2 7 0 true speed 9 latitude 3 9 4 6 N long—"

The glass from another port behind him was shattered. He wheeled about, and fired the revolver, blindly.

Simultaneously with his shot, drowning it out completely, came a tremendous, a

deafening detonation. The Yung Swei shivered, surged a bit to port then steadied down.

CHAPTER XXII.

FLIGHT.

A VERY potent sense of menace in the voice of Fang Wu as he said: "Look behind you!" checked the three of them from leaping upon him in an avenging mass and snuffing him out on the spot.

Hendriks, Harris and MacDonald turned about. Each one of them was prepared for a bad shock; had steeled himself for a new and disastrous danger—some trap.

There was absolutely nothing there.

The blank bulkhead stared them harmlessy in the face. They heard a scurry, the click of a latch, the turning of a key in the door, and Fang Wu was gone. They were securely locked up in the captain's quarters.

A mocking voice from the other side of the closed door said to them, quite distinctly: "As you break down the door, gentlemen, or attempt any exit, in an undignified fashion, from the portholes, you will be shot down like dogs. I preferred having it done that way than while I was personally in the cabin with you. It is so much safer—for me.

"It is also so very much more convenient to have all the officers imprisoned together than at the head of their men, where they belong. Oh, and Captain Hendriks, I am sure that Miss MacTavern will be highly amused when she learns that you mistook the voice of one of your former mess boys, as he screamed so excellently through one of the open ports in your sleeping quarters, for her own rather charming, certainly more charming, voice.

"I bid you good-by, gentlemen. Perhaps we shall meet again. The Infinite is so indefinite. I hope you will be well acclimated by the time when I shall arrive to join you there."

The voice trailed off into silence.

"God strike you pink!" said MacDonald to Harris, who was staring at the closed door with what appeared to be a permanently opened mouth.

"Mess boy! *Mess* boy!" Harris mumbled feebly.

He became an apostate on the spot—a veritable Hierophant of Heresiarchs, to say the very least.

Then they attacked the door. For Harris, it was a symbollic rampage of iconoclasm. It was a stout door, a good oaken door, and their efforts made little impression upon it. They flung themselves repeatedly against it. It gave a little each time—but not enough.

No one mentioned the advisableness of exiting via one of the ports. There was something rather magnificent about bursting through a door, in full war cry and a brandishing of weapons, even if one were shot down for it. But to be popped at when sliding out of a porthole, in the manner with which it was necessary to slide out of a porthole, no! Even heroism has its limits.

Fang Wu rapidly descended to the deck. There was no one about. The men, clutching their fire axes and slice bars, were all patiently huddled together in the starboard alleyway. Harris had left them there with rigid instructions not to budge a nose until he returned to them. He had been so definite as to what not to do, and so vague as to what would happen to them if they did it, that he had rooted the lot of them to the spot.

Fang Wu gained the boat deck aft. He made a sign to a yellow face that peered up at him from number three hatch.

A moment or two later Miss MacTavern and the seven remaining members of the steward's department stood on the boat deck beside him. Placing Miss MacTavern in one of the lifeboats, they lowered it, with much expedition and efficiency, over the side, and slid down the tackles into it as it struck the water. They cast off, shipped the oars, and were well away and heading for the Yung Swei as Hendriks, Harris and MacDonald burst out on deck.

Fang Wu waved politely at them.

MacDonald grabbed the captain's rifle, with which he had made such a brilliant shot at that bird of prey, in his aërie in the crow's nest, and leveled it at Fang Wu.

Fang Wu grew rigid, petrified. This

move on the part of that white devil wasn't in the game at all. For a shocking second he saw the writing on the wall. It read, in Chinese, "Finis." At that instant MacDonald pulled the trigger.

There was no report, no sound. MacDonald had forgotten to reload the rifle.

Fang Wu mentally and fervently promised an oblation of one thumping *tou* of joss sticks to his favorite deity, and made a grab for Miss MacTavern.

By the time MacDonald had the rifle reloaded, his target was little more than a head, grinning amicably at him, from behind a highly indignant and uselessly wriggling heiress. He flung the rifle down onto the deck.

Fang Wu murmured soothingly to his squirming bundle: "These delightful white men, so crass, so savage in their lives, and yet so exquisitely idealistic in this one respect—their attitude toward women!"

Not that he would have it otherwise for worlds, for any number of worlds. It was so convenient. However, it might be just as well to give them something to think about—a little antepast of the great deal that was to come.

He fluttered his handkerchief twice to Captain Tsin, who was standing on the bridge deck of the Yung Swei, watching him. The disappearing guns of the Yung Swei rose slowly above her bulwarks, crashed a single round, and disappeared from view.

Both from an artistic and a dramatic point of view it was quite a success—a blinding success. The effect was tremendous. Fang Wu, from his box seat in the stern of the lifeboat, delightedly took in the immediate confusion that prevailed upon the China Queen.

One shell had struck just forward of her stack. A mass of splinters, fume, smoke—jetted for a flash with flame—rose high into the air, trembled into a ball, and floated away on the breeze. The other three shells had passed harmlessly over her superstructure and, after a ricochet, had plunged into the sea.

Harris's cohorts had decided, en masse, to budge their respective noses, and had come tumbling out on deck in fine confusion, and with a brave brandishing of fire axes and slice bars.

By the time the smoke and fumes from the discharge of the four guns had cleared away from the deck of the Yung Swei, Fang Wu and Miss MacTavern were aboard her and had gained the bridge deck. Captain Tsin hurried toward them. As they met, a highly excited sailor, blood streaming from a gun wound in his cheek, dashed up to them and, omitting all ceremonials, announced in Chinese that a white devil, with fire shooting from his nose, eyes and mouth, had barricaded himself in the wireless room, and was sending out messages at the rate of one a minute—having first indubitably eaten alive the operator of the Yung Swei, who was nowhere to be found.

Fang Wu was the first to be struck with the full importance of this lurid and highly colored announcement. He stripped it of its Oriental embellishments, and came to the disturbing conclusion that that young squirt from the China Queen had managed to put a crimp in his bonnet, was, technically speaking, foiling him—not alone him, but a good slice of the population of China as well.

"Lower the aëriel to the deck!"

The sailor, having again witnessed the miracle of a calorific mouth, clattered off. Fang Wu, dropping the rôle of pyrotechnist, turned to Tsin.

"That is the most serious check we have encountered yet. Flight, immediate flight at full speed is our only hope. We can waste no time amusing ourselves with the China Queen. Sink her, and order full speed ahead!"

"The men in the boats? They are already lowering them over the side."

"Sink her! The boats are of no consequence."

Tsin gave a rapid order to the gun crews below. Three furious rounds crashed. The China Queen, vaguely seen through the drifts and eddies of the smoke, shuddered; her stack crashed forward; she began to settle swiftly at her bow.

Tsin rang the Yung Swei full speed ahead. Very distinctly, and very pleasantly, through the choking haze, Fang Wu

spoke to Tsin—as though he were relating the most amusing anecdote in the world:

"One needn't worry about the men in the lifeboats, captain. I personally poisoned the water in them myself. I doubt whether any message sent out from here could bring aid within ten hours or so: surely long enough for them to have grown pleasantly thirsty!"

He paused, bit his under lip. The disturbing thought had come to him that he had forgotten to remove the signal rockets from the lifeboats. It was a small matter, a detail, still— Then, quite incomprehensibly to Tsin, he added: "It is a most unfortunate fact that the only things in life of true importance are the stupendous climaxes that are sometimes achieved by trifles."

When the smoke had cleared from the final round, the Yung Swei was forging full speed ahead. Great sheets of spray surged and broke athwart her bow.

All eyes were riveted on the China Queen, whose stern was high in the air, her forward end entirely submerged, clearly settling for her final plunge. Slowly, then with increasing rapidity, she slipped beneath the waves. A muffled concussion, followed by a surface disturbance, indicated that her boilers had blown up.

At some distance away from her, three white specks bobbed upon the water. They were her lifeboats, with their cargo of human lives who would soon be thirsty, and would want to drink—

Fang Wu hugged the image to himself. He would give much *cash*, many *taels*, to view the ravages of that thirst quenching. He debated, pleasurably, the comparative values between the first expressions of horror that would come into the faces of the drinkers when they realized that the water had been poisoned, and the later expressions of despair, tragedy, pain—

"We will now," he said to Tsin, "attend to our guests—Miss MacTavern, the interesting Mr. Rutledge, and that gentleman in the wireless room."

But the guests were not there to be attended to. Miss MacTavern had been left standing near the head of the ladder leading down to the well deck. The sailor who had been detailed to guard her was now lying flat on his back, with an eye already puffing up and pigmented with various beautiful, if un-Oriental, shades of color. Rutledge, too, was a minus quantity. The mess boy, who had comprised his bodyguard, was standing, staring stupidly at his own empty hands, out of which the revolver had been snatched.

Fang Wu shrugged.

"I am afraid they have been learning a few little tricks from me. Well, let us look for them. It will be a pleasing divertisement to while away the monotonous moments on board. Come, captain!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

DEFENSE.

DURING the confusion following the arrival of Fang Wu, the firing of the Yung Swei's battery, with its attendant veil of smoke, Rutledge had not been diddling his thumbs. In spite of the tragic qualities of the situation, he was filled with an irrepressible sense of happiness at having his ginger-headed piece in sight again.

As he would probably be killed anyway, what more glorious death could there be than to offer his life in one supreme effort for her sake? Ah, *dulce et decorum est pro Rufusa mori!* Renouncing her dimmed into a childish pastime in comparison with that.

He pointedly winked and screwed his face into an expression intended to denote reassurance at her, through a rift in the smoke eddies from the first round. He was both relieved and shocked when she deliberately winked back. There was nothing amateurish about that wink.

Rutledge decided that the thing of immediate importance was to get her away at once to some place in which they could barricade themselves, and where he would be able to defend her.

At first he had thought of grabbing her and leaping over the side, then towing her, if necessary, back to the lifeboats of the China Queen. He had discarded the plan as unfeasible. They would pursue them. Possibly they would shoot at them at least

at him. There would be nothing spectacular about his death.

After all, he only had one death to spend, and he desired to spend it magnificently, in some glorious outburst of fighting, of smashings, of uproarings, glutted with shrieks from his dying victims; a scene that would linger, live in her eyes—when he would be gone. He remembered Sparks's statements about the impregnability of the wireless shack. If he could only get her back there!

The second round had just been fired, adding its fog of smoke and fumes to that of the first. Rutledge glanced cautiously at the hazy figures of his captors. Fang Wu and Tsin were peering engrossed at the ravaging of the China Queen. Miss MacTavern and her guard were almost blotted out, the vaguest of shapes. That gun-snitching, almond-eyed mess boy, standing somewhere in the general locale of his backbone, was the only serious block in his path.

Very discreetly, he started to turn around, every muscle in him fully prepared to assist his hands in grabbing that Colt thirty-eight, and his foot in planting an energetic kick in the pit of that interfering young person's stomach. It was no time to bother about the niceties set forth by the Marquis of Queensbury. Rutledge completed the turn, looked at his guardian, and gasped. Well he might.

The mess boy had a finger plugged in each ear, and his eyelids screwed tight together. The revolver was trembling skyward at a rakish angle of about forty-five degrees.

Rutledge snatched his revolver and, shoving the mess boy head over heels backward into the passage, hastened to his goddess's side.

The mess boy, later recounting the episode to such sundry sympathizers whom he could inveigle into listening to him, claimed that one of the gunners had deflected his aim the scandalous part of an arc and that the shell from the gun had singed the very buttons from his jacket.

Rutledge stalked the young husky, whose business it was to sit tight upon the caprices of Miss MacTavern, plainly and candidly from the rear. There would be time enough for heroics later. He drew the line, however, at hitting the man from behind. Apart from the ethical issue at stake, it wouldn't have done any good. So he gripped him by the shoulder and spun him about.

Before the sailor had even begun to recover from the wonderment of why he was thus suddenly experiencing the sensations of a top, Rutledge had planted a blow squarely on his right eye, for purposes of embellishment, and one on the point of the jaw for purposes of inducing sound, if unsweet, slumber. He mumbled something in his celestial one's ear, and clutching her by the hand, fled aft, through the splendid obscurity of the swirling smokes from the third, and last, round.

A few moments later Rutledge, Miss MacTavern and Sparks were together in the wireless shack. The occupant, the legal occupant, of the bunk room had been ousted onto the deck.

A hasty and tense council of war ensued. It resulted in two of the ports being opened, one forward and one aft, and Rutledge and Sparks taking up a position at each, with loaded revolvers firmly clutched in their hands. Rutledge, at the after end, could command the ladder leading to the deck below and well to both sides. Sparks, from his position, could cover the deck as far forward as the stack.

They wondered at the complete silence that had fallen after the firing of the third round. They heard nothing but the vibrations of the Yung Swei as she quivered beneath the racing impulse of her engines, and the hiss and surge of the water streaking by. They stood at their posts with nerves braced for the struggle that was bound to come.

"Believe you me, Peter, it's goin' to be some jamboree!" Sparks threw over his shoulder.

Rutledge grunted. This inactivity bothered him, worried him. Then there was that ginger-headed piece constantly in his mind; that wonderful young nuisance, whom he knew was sitting tensely on the edge of a chair and gazing, bodkin-eyed, at the exact center of the back of his head.

"What did you mean by getting wrapped up in a coffin an' come peeping—" He stopped. The outburst had been absolutely unintentional.

"I didn't mean to."

Rutledge flushed a healthy, deep brick red.

"[illegible] I was looking ahead."

He glared at [illegible] and decided whether that quickly suppressed sound he had heard had been the ghost of a sob, or a chuckle. [illegible]

"You have no idea, Mr. Rutledge," Miss MacTavern said evenly, "the nice things that man with the scar said about white men while we were in the rowboat."

"[illegible]"

"[illegible]"

"And I suppose you're being sarcastic. His language must have been frightful; certainly not fit for a very young girl like you [illegible]"

She sailed smoothly past the quite unveiled dig.

"Not at all. He said you were so ideal[illegible]"

Rutledge gave her one squeezed-up look, intended to be a perfect blend between sneeriness and viciousness, and returned to a minute observing of his prospective field of fire. He heard that noise again, that noise that was something between a sob and a giggle. This time the giggle part of it was quite unmistakable. He wheeled on her sharply. Her face was perfectly expressionless, although from the rapid lowering of her eyes, they had undoubtedly been focused upon the back of his head.

"If you think this is a joke—"

"I don't; indeed I don't, Mr. Rutledge!" Those eyes were full upon him now. He glared into them.

"[illegible]" Sparks broke in. "If you [illegible] birds don't cut out this chinnin' and you, Pete, [illegible] gain to be trouble. Come out of them there clouds, Pete, and look a few cold, hard facts in the face."

"What facts?" Rutledge demanded, frigidly.

"The fact that there's the cutest little bunch of slip-foot wild cats you ever went to see in your life outside of a zoo holdin' a field [illegible] somewheres on this here ocean as to the hottest way they can get us out o' this here fortress 'n' skin us alive."

"Is that a fact?"

"I'll say it's a fact—" Spat! His pistol cut the stillness of the cabin. "And I'll say that there little point of lead what just took a walk from the mouth of this here gat's another fact—a good, cold, hard fact."

"Get him?"

"He ducked."

It struck Rutledge that his ginger-headed piece hadn't screamed. He glanced covertly at her. Her face was a bit drawn, not much color left in it, but her eyes were bright—two disturbingly, shining, interesting things.

"Who was it, Sparks?"

"Just a Chink. Back of the stack now, I guess. From now on you and me play Sister Annes, Pete." He turned obligingly to Miss MacTavern. "She's the dame in a yarn called 'Blue Beard' who looks for dust on a road from a castle-tower turret window."

"Oh, yes?" Miss MacTavern firmly suppressed any further "noises." "I think I've read the story."

"It's a kid's yarn. A guy what must have been nuts sent it aboard with the ship's library. I never piped it was a kid's layout until I comes across another yarn in the same book dealin' with fairies—some skirt labeled Titania, like a Cunard liner, and oh, boy! was I mad? Say, you couldn't see that there book travelin' into the drink for dust."

Rutledge fired.

"Fact number three, Pete. You get him?"

"Only parted his hair," Rutledge growled. "He stuck his head up over the [illegible]. Guess they're [illegible] kid, until they show more beef to shoot at."

They waited.

Nothing happened—all through the rest of that endless, interminable day. There were long periods of silence; long periods of rambling talk, rambles during which Rutledge, unwittingly, opened up his heart. He told his story. It was similar to the story of every man who goes to sea, in its openness

and simplicity, its small affairs, each magnified to adventure, to romance, and underneath it all, as deep and broad and tragic as the sea itself, a restless current of great loneliness, the empty longing of the heart of a boy for a home, and for the mother yearning in it; a longing guarded behind thick walls of scoffing reserve and only admitted at odd moments on some long, still watch at night, beneath the friendly sympathy of understanding stars—kind, godly eyes, that would not mock this one love that was sacred.

Miss MacTavern slept a little and, later, insisted on relieving the other two watchers in turn while they snatched some much-needed rest. The sun pursued its leisurely passage across the heavens and sank in the western sky. The darkness greedily began to blot out the light.

After an unusually lengthy silence, Miss MacTavern suddenly stated "I'm thirsty."

Rutledge and Sparks were thirsty, too—had been so for hours, uncomfortable hours of parching dryness.

"I wonder if there isn't some water in this place?" Miss MacTavern pursued the subject hopefully.

Rutledge shook his head. He had already looked for water in the container above the basin in the bunk room. It was quite empty. He said nothing about the bucketfuls of water that had been splashed up on their deck by unseen hands from the deck below; deliberate, wasteful bucketfuls, suggestive agents, sent to augment and to force to the breaking point the scorch in their throats. Finally he answered her.

"I guess that's what they're sort of figuring on doing, Mary. It's cheaper for them that way."

Both of them momentarily forgot their thirst under the electrifying thought that he had called her Mary. Then his full meaning struck her: starvation or thirst would ultimately drive them out from their shelter and into the open, where they would either be shot down or captured. She distinctly did not want Rutledge to be either shot down or captured. She wanted to attend to the capturing part of it herself.

For a long moment Rutledge looked at her. He could hardly see her, night was falling so swiftly. There was no sense in renouncing her again—for the third time. What was the use? He was going to die for her.

"See here," he said, "Mary, we're all thinking about the same thing—no chuck, no water—Mary. Suppose that message Sparks sent out was picked up? It may be days before they find us. Well—Mary—so far as I can see, our only hope is to keep alive for those days. There's no chance of their getting us while we stick in here. We could shoot them down one by one. Sparks and I both have a pocketful of bullets—Mary. It's this way. There's sure no hope for Sparks or me if they get us, but they wouldn't dare touch us so long as they were safe themselves. But don't you see, if some blessed gunboat should happen to pick up that message, and should come alongside to capture the pack of them why they, I guess they'd just kill you too—Mary. So—so you've got to stay in here where it's safe, and one of us two has got to stay alive to keep you alive, and one of us two has got to go outside and get chuck to keep all of us alive—Mary. See?"

Nothing but the lack of breath stopped him. It was an enormous, an unheard of, speech for Rutledge. Sparks later referred to it as his "Mary" speech.

"I do see, Peter— Oh, I'm not worth it—I—"

"Cut that! You, Mary, shut up!"

"Yes, Peter."

"As I say, we've got to get chuck and water. It'll be black as pitch in ten minutes. I figure they won't expect us to break out so soon, certainly not to-night. They'll be expecting us to wait until we're driven to it, say to-morrow night." He paused a minute. "I'm going out."

Sparks firmly but politely snorted.

"They'd be watchin' the door, Pete. They'd see you open it."

"Got to take that chance, kid."

"I got a better idea."

"Shoot."

"I'm skinny and small."

"You are."

"Well, medium, anyway. There's that porthole in the bunk room in there on the

side. When she's dark enough I bet no one'd see me slide out of there."

"Nothing doing, Sparks! This is my job."

"Say, see here, Pete, this ain't no Alfonse-Gastong party. We need chuck. There's a fat chance of that hull of yours pullin' any ghostly flits about this here ship, night or no night, while me, with my slender figure, that's a different yarn.

"Now listen and get me straight. I may come back here considerable quicker than what I went, in which case there won't be no time for no fancy swan dives through no portholes, so be on the lookout, the *quirky-virky*—get me? And if you hear any mad, sweet rush, and a healthy pounding on that there door, for the love of Mike open her up!"

A quarter of an hour later Sparks slipped through the porthole in the starboard end of the bunk room. The shade of Ernest Montague de Beauprix went with him.

There were no means of gauging how long they waited. It seemed hours.

"He'll be back soon now, Mary," Rutledge whispered.

"Yes, Peter."

She was standing very near to him in the darkness.

"Don't be afraid, Mary."

"I'm glad you are here, Peter."

"So am I—hist!" Love's blooming dream received a sharp nip in the bud. "Listen—hear that?"

It sounded like the patter of running feet, like a gasp. Some one pounded on the door.

Rutledge jumped for the door and flung it open. The beam from an electric torch flashed into his eyes, blinding him. A sharp blow from a stick sent the revolver clattering from his hand.

He smashed the flashlight to the deck in turn, and leaped backward for the spot where he had left his Mary. He found her, grabbed her, and bundled her with a shove into the bunk room. Then he wheeled to give battle in the dark; the battle he had dreamed of, visioned.

The wine of supreme sacrifice coursed in his; [illegible] to superstrengths. He was an animal—a splendid, gorgeous animal—roaring defiance at a mess of jackals who were seething, crushing in through the entrance to his lair. His love might not be able to see him swinging on to death—for he admitted now he loved her, loved her deeply, truly, loved her measurelessly, with all the wonder of that magic intoxication singing passionately in his heart—the memory of this ending might not linger, live in her memory when he would be gone, but the sound of it would linger, would ring forever in her ears. He promised himself that. And then he set to work.

Every man, every inch of flesh opposing him, would be his enemy. There would be no necessity for picking and choosing. So he waded in. What matter the odds? The greater, the more targets there would be to hit in this darkness, and the fewer the blank spaces.

It was an orgy, a bacchanal of squnches, thumpings, smacking blows, of squeals, and grunts, and mighty bellowings—a superb windmill run amuck, with flaying arms that struck in piston crashes against a smother of milling, crushing bundles, chattering in high, falsetto shrieks.

And some one switched on the lights.

Rutledge, magnificently alone, a carnage of mauled figures glaring at him, his Mary standing bravely in the doorway behind him, stood looking into a pair of eyes that glittered derisively in the gently smiling and quite unblemished face of Fang Wu.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PURSUIT.

STREAKING through the waters at a nerve-jarring speed of thirty knots per hour, the U. S. S. Western State darted like an avenging arrow toward the theoretical spot on the ocean's broad expanse designated as thirty-nine forty-six north, one seventy sixteen east.

In the living room of the captain's quarters, Clinton MacTavern gripped the arms of the chair, in which he was doing his best to sit, and stared across at Captain McGee.

Both were elderly men—McGee, wiry,

straight in carriage: MacTavern, slightly shorter, and stouter in build. Both were stamped with the unmistakable seal of leaders of men.

"How many more hours did you say?"

"Ten, at the most. It's been three hours since we picked up their message."

"The things that may have happened during these three hours!" MacTavern muttered. "The things that may be happening now!"

"We will know shortly."

"If we ever know!"

McGee nodded. He admired MacTavern, admired him as a man who had achieved success. It hurt him to see him breaking under the strain. He had held up so splendidly during the past days. He tried to divert him with talk.

"At any rate," McGee said, "Cairn was right. You were wise to turn the case over to the Secret Service."

"It is political in its nature as much as civil."

"Quite so. And Cairn is the best man they've got."

"He was the first one to suggest the only logical way of solving the riddle—to turn against them the very weapon they hoped to get possession of."

"Your wealth, and the power it would give them."

"And the power, thank God, it gave me. It took exactly five hundred thousand dollars, McGee, and a binding promise of absolute safety and immunity, to buy just one of the men higher up; to get the one illuminating ray of light on the mystery that we have been able to obtain—the fact that my daughter had in some manner been smuggled aboard a boat on the west coast. Even he, the man we bought, knew no more. There is no doubt about that. But it was something.

"It gave us a definite start to work on; made it possible for me to arrange in Washington for naval assistance, for having this vessel placed at my disposal. Best of all, it gave me the satisfaction of being able to do something definite. You—you have never seen my little girl, McGee. I—"

"I understand, MacTavern, quite understand. Little tot of my own at home."

"Really?"

"Yes, indeed. Cunning little vixen—"

Three hundred odd miles to westward, three lifeboats, connected by lines, drifted aimlessly upon the gentle swells. The blank glare of the morning sun beat down upon them.

It is perfectly possible that no one of the occupants in any one of the three boats could state exactly what had taken place. After that first deafening round, and the bursting of that shell just forward of the stack, everything had been a bedlam of confusion, a mad scramble, pierced by several clear-cut and steady-voiced orders.

These orders had been instantly, if subconsciously, carried out. They had lowered the boats, so much was certain, and had got away just before the three final rounds from the Yung Swei had dealt their death blow to the China Queen.

They had been too nerve-tired to speculate, to wonder at the Yung Swei sheering off and leaving them, without first sending their boats, and themselves, to the bottom; too tired for anything but sleep, and a blind feeling of relief in the thought that it was all over.

Their responsibility was at an end. All that faced them was the possibility that their stock of provisions and their water supply might give out before they were picked up. The very futurity of that possibility robbed it of any immediate terrors.

For three solid hours they slept to a man.

Hendriks was the first to wake up. His first glance was to westward. There was no trace of the Yung Swei. His eye slowly traveled the whole circle of the horizon. It was unbroken by sign or smoke of any ship. He observed the sky. He yawned.

Then he realized that he was thirsty.

"Yes, sir," McGee continued, "regular little towhead!"

"My girl's hair is red," MacTavern broke in, "brick red. She calls it titan flame color, the young imp!" he chuckled. "She's a [illegible] when she wants to be. I remember Margaret—my wife, sir. Died four years ago. The sweetest [illegible] to say

that Mary had my disposition, was like me to a dot."

"It's the same way with Ellen, that's my little girl's name. Of course she's much younger than yours—only six. Be seven the third of next January. By gad, but they do grow up! Not by inches, when they're that age, but by feet. Why, she'll be in long dresses before I know it!"

"Yes, they do grow up; not only up, but into us. Each year, each day, they become more firmly woven into us. Mary's heart is my heart, McGee, and her suffering is my suffering. I'm going to tell you something." MacTavern leaned well forward in his chair. "There are moments when I feel that Margaret is watching over her. It's the one thought, superstition, call it what you like, that keeps me from going insane; moments when I feel she is with both of us, has come back to us in some inexplicable way. I believe, McGee, that the bond that binds a mother to her child is strong enough, and great enough, to survive even death."

There was a cask of water right alongside of Hendriks. He reached out and took the cork from the bunghole. He wondered when the cask had been filled last. The water would be stale. He tried to remember when the casks had been filled, staring, meanwhile, at the cork. There was a whitish streak on the cork, and, just below it, a ring of discoloration. He rubbed his finger across the streak. A whitish powder came off on his finger. He touched it to the top of his tongue and felt a sharp, burning sensation.

He spat.

What a fool he was to have forgotten! He tipped the cask over the edge of the boat and let its contents run out into the sea. Then, careful not to wake the still sleeping men, he jettisoned all rations and water from the boat. Drawing the other two boats alongside, by means of the connecting lines, he did the same in them. Then he resumed his post, sitting haggard and careworn, his eyes carelessly roving backward and forward around the horizon's rim.

Ten hours later—ten torturous, bitterly long hours later—a smudge of smoke was sighted to eastward, followed shortly by [illegible] to pass them about three miles to northward.

Twenty minutes later three sheaves of signal rockets shot skyward from the lifeboats. Even in the broad daylight they were distinctly discernible.

"Hard a'starb'd!" called the navigating officer on duty aboard the U. S. S. Western State.

A quarter of an hour later Hendriks was seated with MacTavern and Captain McGee in the latter's room.

Immediately after Hendriks's arrival a radio had been broadcasted, giving a complete and accurate description, obtained from him, of the Yung Swei, and asking for any information as to her whereabouts. At twenty-minute intervals the same radio was repeated.

Below, in one of the junior messes, Harris and MacDonald formed the nucleus of a group of star-eyed youngsters who listened, fascinated, to the impassioned tale that was being embroidered by Harris.

Harris was completely, utterly happy. He had found his spotlight at last. MacDonald also listened, also was fascinated, but from different reason, principally astonishment. He could scarcely credit his ears. Had there ever such a yarn as this one been spun in the history of man as this one that was now being spun by Harris, eloquently, colorfully, glowing with wordy fires of silks and satins, blood and jewels, and lovely faces? At last, surfeited with glorious sketchings—sketchings through which there had run a modest, if emphatic, *leit motif* of everlasting "I's"—Harris called a truce upon bedazzlements.

"And so you see, fellows," he concluded, "there'll be no more sea for mine—no, sir! It's *ho* for a home in each one of the capi[illegible] MacTavern will scatter riches—salvage?" He laughed exultantly, drunkenly. "What's the pile of shekels you get for salvaging a ship, in comparison with the piles and piles of shekels you'll get for salvaging an heiress?"

To MacDonald, the amazing part of the whole thing was that, several weeks later, it all came true—all of Harris's extraordinary ravings; came true in a splendid shower of gold that MacTavern freely lavished upon all of them.

At nine o'clock that night a message was received from the American freighter Walter Goodman stating that a boat, answering to the description called for, had been sighted, just before dusk, in approximately latitude thirty-eight twelve north, and longitude one-sixty-seven west.

"Well, gentlemen"—Captain McGee smiled grimly upon MacTavern and Hendriks—"the chase is on. We will be up with them before dawn."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FINAL CARD.

ONE thought stood paramount in Rutledge's mind as he stared into the eyes of Fang Wu—they would know the worst. "What have you done with Sparks?" he asked.

"You shall see. Both of you shall see. I might add that the same temporary fate is waiting for both of you. You will oblige me, I am sure"—Fang Wu glanced meaningly at the revolver with which he was covering Rutledge—"by leaving these quarters. I wish to use our radio set or I should not dream of inconveniencing you."

These two were his mice, and he enjoyed playing with them. He led them forward along the dark deck, through dimly lighted passageways, where groups of men stared menacingly at them, eying them with smoldering, brutish eyes.

A few moments later they were alone with Sparks. Fang Wu had shoved them into a cabin—forward—closed the heavy door, which was its only means of exit, and had locked it from the outside. Rutledge wondered at the reprieve. He had expected to find Sparks either in the throes of torture, or dead.

"What happened to you, Sparks?"

There was more than a trace of: "I'll say your slender figure proved a washout" in Rutledge's manner.

"They jumped me before I'd gone ten feet. Waitin' for me just for'rd of the stack; didn't give me no time to cry out. Didn't give me nuthin' but a bent neck. That guy with the scarred mitt was wised up to the whole frame—had a stool crouched down to the port listenin' to everything we said. Must have crawled there after dark."

Courtesy prevented Sparks from adding: "While you were chinnin' with that there Mary jane." However, he did his best to imply as much in one mean, meaning look. The look registered.

The door was unlocked, then opened.

Fang Wu came in. He was followed by a boy, carrying a tray, on which was food and a carafe of water. The boy placed the tray on a table, then left the cabin.

Fang Wu began to play with his mice:

"Doubt, anxiety, the fear inspired by anticipation, all of us know its subtle, its delicately torturing values. I can imagine, Miss MacTavern, the horrors that your estimable father has been, and must still be, experiencing. I assure you"—he smiled at her—"they are mere trifles, mere petals of plum blossoms fluttering on idle breezes, in comparison with"—he laughed outright—"what the dear gentleman is about to endure."

Fang Wu's hand shot from behind his back, where he had been holding it since he had come into the cabin, and he leveled a revolver at Rutledge, who had shown signs of a blinding desire to devour him on the spot.

"Yes," Fang Wu continued, "than what he is about to endure. This little game of chess we have been playing is drawing to a close. It will result in a stalemate that will be most amusing to me. I shall outline for you my final move, my *coup de grâce*, so that its delicious spice may agreeably savor your coming repast." Fang Wu waved his hand graciously in the direction of the dishes.

"Your father, dear lady, is at this moment speeding toward you at the rate, I should judge, of approximately thirty knots an hour, aboard the United States Destroyer Western State." He paused an instant to permit the emotion of relief to surge fully into the faces of his three ad-

mirably performing mice. "But—let us consider the details of the situation—linger for delightful moments over each square.

"How are the chess men set upon the board? First, your father. He possesses the knowledge of our approximate position and the means to reach us. When he does so, he further possesses the means to capture us, to sink us if he so desires, to submit us to trial, to capital punishment, to what you will—if he so desires! And I? Against this formidable array? A few little guns, a boat of indifferent speed, a few men, and, my dear, you.

"Of lesser value, but still of account, I have Mr. Rutledge and also Mr. Sparks. They are of little account in comparison with you, whom I consider as my queen, but then I have known a single pawn to have been the deciding factor in a game of chess. You marvel at the manner in which I know these things, these facts about the movements of your father. The East is full of things that are strange, my dear, of things that are occult."

"Bosh!" snorted Sparks. "Flubdub!"

The interruption shattered, for Fang Wu, what had been a rather exquisite little dramatic moment. It disturbed him into a frown which he ruffled upon Sparks.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said bosh—bosh and flubdub."

"And why"—Fang Wu grew icily polite—"might I inquire, do you remark 'bosh' and 'flubdub'? I regret that my knowledge of your language is so halting that I am unacquainted with the precise meaning of the two—the two—er—gems."

"Say, listen here, bo, stop tryin' to pull this snake charmin' act on this little trio, because we're wise, wise [illegible]." Sparks pointed an emphatic finger at Fang Wu. "The only occult thing about the business is how that there ham op of yours managed to revive enough, after the D. T.s I handed him this mornin', to cop the dope about this dame's old man after you got Pete 'n' her out of the wireless shack and he could listen in again."

Fang Wu, having recovered from the first chilly shock to his art, grinned—Orientally. What an astonishing little game-cock this disrupter of illusions seemed to be!

"Ah well," Fang Wu sighed, "if you insist—yes. Youth, youth! What can be more refreshing, more romantically crude! Yes, dear boy, that is the gassy truth which I had enveloped, so beautifully, within the iridescence of my little bubble. Mr. Ah Lee, whom you so delicately refer to as my 'ham op,' did, just, succeed in intercepting a flight of most interesting messages that were being tossed between the Western State and a freighter, by name of Walter Goodman. It appears that the Walter Goodman caught sight of us around dusk, and that she has betrayed our approximate location to our pursuers. Perhaps there are some other little bubbles that you might care to prick?"

"There is—several."

"I am at your service." Fang Wu bowed elaborately. It amused him to be complaisant—to an extent.

"Ain't it a fact that the time when our steward, Hong Wing, and them two mess boys were found knocked out cold on the deck of the pantry, and he claimed that they'd been handed the fadeout by some prune who first switched the lights out on them, and yet them lights was on when we found the three of them lying there, that Hong Wing pulled the stunt himself, so as to make us think the steward's department wasn't in on the little game? Ain't it a fact?

"And ain't it a fact that the time when the saloon mess boy got into the old man's cabin where I was sittin' after decodin' that there message you sent, and the lights were put out, that what he wanted was to get that message? And that the reason why he didn't knife me was because he wanted to find out where I had the message hid-

[illegible] moseying around outside, learns that Pete and this here dame is headin' our way, and so he pounded on the door to make the mess boy open it up so as he could turn me off before Pete got there to help me? Ain't it a fact?"

"Alas, it is!"

"And ain't it a fact that your hangout that time we made the search of the ship for you was in one of the hawse pipes? Ain't it a fact?"

"It—ain't." Fang Wu chortled. "Let me set you right. My abode, hangout if you wish, at that particular moment, was in the packing case. You see, there were two compartments—one for the coffin, and one beneath it, for me. Possibly you remember the rather unnecessarily large dimensions of the case? And now shall we proceed to the next bubble?"

"No," Sparks answered defensively; "I never saw that case."

"A fact for which I am very glad," Fang Wu stated emphatically, and sincerely. "Shall we now return to our little game of chess? We had, I believe, arrayed the pieces, and the next move was to be mine. What could I do? I will tell you. To attempt flight would be impractical, quite hopeless. The Western State would pursue us at twice our speed. We would be reported by every ship that crossed our path. Eventually they would come up with us. Therefore, why struggle against the inevitable?

"I shall permit, assist even, the Western State to find us. When she comes alongside of us, I shall then make my move. This, my dear Miss MacTavern, is it." Fang Wu handed a typed message blank to Miss MacTavern. "It is a copy of the message I shall send to your father aboard the Western State when she shall come alongside us sometime before dawn. You will wonder why I do not radio it to him now, why I wait until they find us. You may think that to do so is a bit of bravado, foolhardiness. Perhaps I can explain.

"It is a psychological truth that what the eye sees for itself is more convincing than the written word. Your father will undoubtedly be standing at some vantage point aboard the Western State, presumably with field glasses, with which he will be searching our decks for you. By that time he will have just read this message. Possibly the written word might not convince him. Therefore, you and I, with Mr. Rutledge and Mr. Sparks, in the rôle of minor characters perhaps, shall stage a little performance, for your father's benefit, upon our deck.

"He shall be able to witness it quite clearly through his glasses. Do you find it difficult to believe me, my dear Miss MacTavern, when I tell you that our little performance will be quite, quite convincing?" Fang Wu pointed to the message blank in Miss MacTavern's hand. "I might add that that message is my final card. A pleasant supper!"

Fang Wu bowed slightly, and left the cabin. They heard the key turn in the lock. Miss MacTavern read the message. Her face paled.

"May I see it?" Rutledge asked.

She handed it to him. Sparks and he read it together:

> Rdo nr I ck 138 SS Yung Swei Fld I am date to: Clinton MacTavern aboard USS Western State.
>
> Warning (period) at the first shot fired by you (comma) at the first attempt made by you to board us the following events will take place (colon) the first officer and wireless operator of the SS China Queen will instantly be subjected to death by torture—the torture to consist first of needle pricks upon the eyeballs and a slow tearing out of the fingernails, this to be followed by other methods of producing acute pain until death shall result (semicolon) that is only a prelude to the tortures that will be inflicted upon your daughter (period) You have only one alternative sheer off immediately and make no effort at pursuit nor arrange for other vessels to trail us (period) In good time you shall hear from us again (period)
>
> (Signed) MASTER OF YUNG SWEI.

After finishing the letter Sparks said, "We've got to get out of here, Pete!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GIFT.

"I SAY we eat that chuck." Sparks eyed, hungrily, the tray of food on the table. "They wouldn't monkey with that. According to that there sweet *billy-doo* they want us just about as fresh 'n' kickin' as can be."

The food and water vanished beneath an instant onslaught.

Sparks had been standing in front of the locked door, looking at it, curiously.

"S'pose there's any one on guard outside?" he asked.

"Whether there is or not," Rutledge an-

swered, "I'm going to bust her open and see."

"Hold on a minute, Pete. You got a hairpin, miss?"

Miss MacTavern produced a hairpin. Sparks took it and picked up a large sheet of blotting paper from the desk. He had all the manners of a Houdini about to transform a peanut into a flock of pigeons.

Rutledge and Miss MacTavern watched him apathetically. Neither was in the mood for a display of magic. Sparks slipped the sheet of blotting paper through the crack at the bottom of the door, then worked the hairpin about in the lock. After a minute of intense and concentrated jabbing, he gave a grunt of satisfaction, and very carefully drew the blotting paper back through the crack. The key to the door lay where it had fallen upon it.

"Kid, where in hell did you learn how to do that?"

Sparks had the grace to blush.

"I had a shore job once." He added, trippingly: "The sea's more healthy. Well, now that we've got this here key, what are we goin' to do about it?"

"Open that door and get out."

"Sure—promenade the deck, I suppose, until they lead us, tenderlike, by the mitt back again! Nit! Say, Pete, if you got anything above your neck but your head now is the time to use it."

"You two come with me."

Rutledge took the key and carefully opened the door, inch by inch. It opened, as they knew, directly upon a passage. The passage was dark. They passed out into it. Rutledge closed the door and locked it again.

"We'll take the key with us," he whispered. "They'll look around for it first, thinking some other one of them has it. It may give us just the extra time we need."

"Say, time for what?" Sparks hissed.

"Shut up, kid—come!"

They stole along the passage. It ended in an open doorway leading out onto the forward deck. Great gusts of cool wind swept into it.

Outside it was still dark. They moved along on all fours until they had reached the forepeak. Just forward of the anchor windlass, the dim form of a sailor on lookout could be seen.

Rutledge went forward alone. He crept upon the sailor. He waited until the sailor came abreast the windlass in his patrolling. With a quick lunge Rutledge grappled him about the knees and hurled him sidewise before he could cry out. The sailor's forehead came up against the niggerhead of the windlass with a sharp crack. Then he lay, very limp, upon the deck. Rutledge lowered him over the side, and returned to the two who were waiting.

"Sparks," he whispered, "you remember saying to Harris, when he searched the China Queen, that if you were the fugitive you'd hide by riding one of the flukes of the anchor? Well, that's what we're going to do now. Are you game, Mary?"

"Yes, Peter."

"Good stuff—now listen! I'll lower Sparks down first. When he's set, I'll lower you, Mary, and he'll get you settled. Then he can help me down after."

Somehow it was done. The three of them were seated on the broad flukes of the starboard anchor, holding on with tense fingers; holding on to keep from falling into that seething, spumous swirl that surged one instant within a few inches of their feet, then shot downward with a suck and gurgle as the bow of the Yung Swei reached high into the air; shot ever downward until the fore foot showed, and then came rushing, screaming, hurtling upward to tear them from their refuge, and drag them down beneath the sea.

Far to eastward, a slender streak of emerald struggled to make way in the darkened sky for dawn.

Clinton MacTavern stood with Captain McGee on the bridge of the Western State. Astern, the sky was filling with the clear, cool tones of daybreak. It was already quite light. It would shortly be sunrise. He swept the horizon with a pair of binoculars.

"Smoke, off the port bow, sir!" came the voice of the lookout clear from above.

At last they had caught her! They would soon be alongside, pumping good, solid lead into her.

They overhauled her with amazing speed. "I believe she's slowed down," McGee stated. "It's her all right—answers the description to a dot!"

Ten minutes later McGee ordered half speed, then slow ahead. They were alongside the Yung Swei. Not more than three hundred yards of water separated them; water that was now glittering in the sun.

At that moment a seaman handed MacTavern the message from Fang Wu.

McGee was speaking into the phone: "Yes, first one shot across her bows, then train the port batteries directly on her. Make ready to lower the boats. You can fire when—"

"Stop—McGee, stop! Don't fire—don't—I—here! Read that!"

McGee read the message.

"Well," he said, "MacTavern, it's up to you."

"We will do"—the words came from MacTavern like so much bitter dust—"exactly as he says. He's got me, McGee—because he's got my little girl."

"*Three people floating astern the Yung Swei!*" the voice from the lookout called sharply. "Two men, and a girl—making signals to us, sir!"

MacTavern grabbed the binoculars.

"It's Mary! She's saved—saved, I tell you! Put out a boat to—"

The words froze on his lips.

He clutched McGee's arm, and pointed to the stern of the Yung Swei.

A solitary figure stood there, well braced against the rolling of the vessel. He held a rifle and was sighting it, with infinite care and precision, upon the head of the girl, floating now several hundred yards astern.

In a single leap McGee reached the bridge telephone.

Eight streaks of fire. A deafening, stupendous, roaring crash. The port batteries of the Western State had spoken.

Great, bellowing waves of smoke rolled slowly away, curving fantastically off to southward across the waves—waves that were unbroken, save for the floating wreckage of the thing that had once been the Yung Swei—save for the three heads still bobbing safely, now far astern, and the well-manned skiff from the Western State that was pulling for them.

For one frightened moment after the Western State had fired, Miss MacTavern had clung to Rutledge; then she had resumed her easy floating at his side.

"Do you know something, Peter?" she said.

"What? I wish you wouldn't make me talk. The water gets in my mouth."

"You are saving my life."

"What of it?"

"I'm glad you admit it this time, and I'm going to give you something for it."

He looked at her. Her face was within six inches of his own. Ribbons of wet hair streamed all over it.

"You look a sight," he said.

"I'm going to give you something for it, Peter."

"I won't take it."

"Then you can give it back to me again—even if you like it."

She moved her face a precise six inches, and kissed him full upon the mouth.

"You little ginger-headed dev—glub—"

A pint or two of salt water checked him for a moment. He took a cautious glance at Sparks who, scandalized, had dived to the privacy of another wave.

Then he gave it back.

THE END.

THE 154TH NOVEL, ORIGINALLY PRINTED SERIALLY IN THIS MAGAZINE, TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM IS

WHISPERING SAGE

By [illegible] and JOSEPH NOEL

(ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, July 1 to August 5, 1922.)

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The Test

By M. M. SOLOMON

THE tragic death of Mrs. Chester Ralling, wife of the famous physician, had a most profound effect in the city of Wayne. Stepping suddenly from behind a street car, she was the victim of a drunken automobile driver who disregarded all traffic regulations. Witnesses afterward testified that he was going at least thirty miles an hour when the accident occurred.

She died shortly after, never regaining consciousness. Attending physicians said there was a fracture of the skull as well as internal injuries.

The untimely death of his wife was a terrible blow to the doctor. He was deeply in love with her, and her passing away seemed to utterly crush him. Dr. Ralling was a specialist in mental diseases, and during his twenty years' practice had become famous. As soon as the news of his wife's death was flashed over the wires messages of condolence began to pour in from all over the country. Several cablegrams came from abroad. Many of these messages, however, were never opened by the grief-stricken physician.

As is generally the case, following the funeral of Mrs. Ralling, the city began to turn its attention to other matters. In due time the affair was but part of Wayne's busy life.

Dr. Ralling, however, changed from the day his wife was killed. He immediately lost interest in everything, including his practice, which heretofore had occupied practically every minute of his time. Urgent calls were ignored, and on several occasions he refused to take note of cases that would have paid handsome fees. The association of which he was president held several meetings to discuss the matter. Committees appointed to wait on him and bring him out of the [illegible]

acknowledged complete failure. Finally, after repeated efforts, they gave up. His personal friends were likewise baffled and agreed among themselves that Mrs. Rallings's death had completely wrecked her husband.

Three months later Dr. Rallings visited the State penitentiary. He had been there on numerous occasions, called to examine inmates suspected of having mental disorders. He was intimately acquainted with McDermott, the warden, and was given a hearty welcome by the latter.

"Why, Dr. Ralling!" he exclaimed. "Welcome! We'd about given up the hope of having a visit from you again."

The doctor smiled faintly.

"It has been a long time, Mac," he returned. "However, I'm here on a matter of business. I'd like to see a man named Lankford—Amos Lankford—who is to be electrocuted Friday."

"Certainly, doctor," returned the warden. "Just a moment."

He pressed a button on the desk, and a moment later instructed the guard that Dr. Ralling be conducted to the death chamber. The doctor followed the guide down the long corridor, and shortly heard the bolt shoot in the lock, leaving him alone with the doomed man.

The prisoner did not look up as Dr. Ralling entered. He sat on the narrow cot, staring sullenly at the blank wall.

"I'm not here to do you any harm, my friend," said Dr. Ralling, walking over and placing his hand on the other's shoulder. "I'm here to do just the opposite."

The man raised his head and fixed his gaze steadily on the doctor's face.

"Yes," repeated Dr. Ralling. "I came here to cheat the chair."

Still Lankford did not speak. He continued to scrutinize the other man, waiting for him to continue. He had heard so many things since the supreme court had affirmed the death sentence that the doctor's words seemed to have no effect whatever. Dr. Ralling sat down by the prisoner. Placing his hands on Lankford's shoulders and looking him straight in the eyes, he continued:

"I know you are doomed to die Friday. But as I said a moment ago, I came here for no other purpose than to cheat the chair. I am Dr. Chester Ralling. Probably you've heard of me. I am going to speak frankly and make you a proposition. When I'm through you can decide. Are you ready to listen?"

Lankford nodded.

"I'm ready to listen to anything," he said dully. "Go ahead."

Dr. Ralling cleared his throat.

"About three months ago my wife was killed," he began. "She was run down by an automobile at the intersection of Fifth Street and Twenty-Third Avenue. She died shortly after the accident occurred.

"Speaking truthfully and from the bottom of my heart, Lankford, I am an infidel. Or, rather, I was until a few nights ago. I doubted the existence of a Supreme Being. I scoffed at such a thing as religion. I did not believe in a hereafter; I laughed at all forms of worship. Atheism was my doctrine; I had no patience with any other creed.

"And it was this very fact that caused my wife the only unhappiness of which I knew. I loved her with all my heart; she was life itself to me. I would have cut off my right arm for her. I would have been dipped in molten lead for her sake. But to profess belief in religious matters was something I could not do, not even for her. At least, the way in which she wanted. She tried to show me the way for years, but something in me wouldn't agree. I was honest enough to tell her the truth. I simply didn't believe; the beast in me, I guess."

He laughed mirthlessly, and continued: "Now, it is possible I was wrong. I'm not sure now I was. At any rate, I always spoke what was in my heart. I said that I was an infidel until a few nights ago. I don't know what I am now. The very night I underwent this change I read in the evening paper that your last appeal had failed, and that you were to die Friday. Then I thought of an idea. That's why I came to see you."

Mopping his forehead with a hand that trembled slightly, he continued: "I was visited by my wife the other night."

Lankford looked at him suspiciously.

"Visited by your wife?" he exclaimed. "What are you talking about? Are you crazy?"

Dr. Ralling shook his head.

"Indeed, I'm not crazy. I insist that I was visited by my wife—spiritually, I mean."

He was silent a moment, gazing steadily at the floor. Suddenly he turned to the prisoner.

"She came to me while I was asleep," he continued, his voice filled with emotion. "Seemed to come in a sort of mist. Laid her hands on my face and smiled. I can almost feel her touching me now." He rose and strode up and down the cell nervously.

A moment later he seemed to steady himself and resumed his seat. "It was so natural that I can see it now," he continued. "It seemed that I was looking at a great black cloud which opened suddenly. A dazzling light came through, and I saw her standing there.

"She came closer and closer, and finally touched me. She spoke to me. 'I hope you'll believe after this, dear,' was all she said. Then I awoke. You can never imagine how I felt. I was shaking like a leaf. My very being seemed stirred to its foundation. I can't understand what has come over me. Ordinarily I would have laughed at such a thing as a mere dream taking hold of me like that.

"Since that night it has preyed on my mind constantly. I have tried to forget. I can't. The picture of my wife before me seems to haunt me. I've got to do something. I must! That's why I am here."

"I can't understand, Dr. Ralling," said Lankford, a trace of bitter sarcasm in his tone, "why you should select me to hear all this. What good can I do? I have something like four days to my credit. What do you mean by coming to me? What did you mean by saying you would cheat the chair?"

"I said I was going to speak frankly," answered the doctor. "And I have. Now I want to make you the proposition." He rose and strode to the door, peeping up and down the hall. Making sure that no one was near, he returned to Lankford. "It's probably a brutal offer," he said. "However, it should appeal to you, as your last chance is gone. Which would you prefer—to go to the chair and be electrocuted by the State, or die as a result of heart failure?"

Lankford drew his breath with a rasping sound and looked at Dr. Ralling quickly. "Good Lord, man!" he faltered. "What do you mean?"

"I'll explain briefly," returned the doctor. "I don't know exactly how to put it. As I told you, I'm a self-confessed infidel. Now I want to try and prove that I am wrong. In the first place, you'll agree that it's better than to go through the tortures of the chair."

Lankford nodded.

"Then I'll enable you to die like that," said Dr. Ralling, "on condition that you will come back and communicate with me in some manner. I don't care how you do it—just so you are able to let me know there is something after this life."

Reaching into a pocket, he produced a small phial containing a greenish liquid. "This is a secret preparation," he said; "one of a number I've discovered. It produces two kinds of sleep; first natural sleep, then the sleep that knows no awakening. If you accept my offer I'll give you this bottle. Simply drink it. In a few minutes you'll feel drowsy. That's all there is to it. The poison will be completely absorbed by your system so that the most rigid investigation will reveal nothing."

A strained silence followed as the doctor ceased. Lankford stared straight ahead, breathing heavily. His hands were tightly clinched, showing white along the knuckles. He swallowed frequently. Dr. Ralling's hand shook like palsy as he returned the phial to his pocket. His face was pale as he looked at Lankford for an answer.

"Good God!" quavered the latter suddenly, bursting into a hysterical laugh which caused a shiver to run over the doctor.

"Not so loud," cautioned Dr. Ralling. "You might attract attention. I'm supposed to be here to examine you in the interest of my profession. Nothing else. What is your answer?"

"Give it to me," whispered Lankford

hoarsely, a wild look in his eyes. "I'll do anything that will keep me out of the chair."

"You promise that after death, if possible in any way, you'll come back and communicate with me?" asked Dr. Ralling as he handed the phial over.

Lankford nodded affirmatively.

"I'll admit that I am a coward," said the doctor. "But I am anxious to bring this thing to a test. I want to know if I've been wrong all these years. Possibly I have done enough already to merit eternal punishment. I don't know. I'm still doubtful. By giving you this poison I'm really doing a good deed. The State will get its pound of flesh; it ought not to object."

"Why are you doing all this—why are you so anxious to know if there is a hereafter?" asked Lankford huskily.

"If I've been wrong, life won't be worth a row of pins to me," stated the doctor calmly. "My wife was everything to me. Nothing else matters. If I believed now that she is somewhere waiting for me, I would take my own life to-day. But I am afraid. I want to make sure. That's the whole thing. It is your duty to let me know.

"Let me suggest that you wait a little while—at least a day or so," the doctor said as he rose to go. "It might look suspicious if your death occurs too soon after my visit."

Lankford did not answer. He sat with his face cupped in his hands, staring at the floor as the door closed behind the doctor.

"Perfectly rational," said Dr. Ralling to the warden as they shook hands. "But in a highly nervous state as a natural result of what he has gone through."

The Thursday afternoon paper contained a vivid account of Lankford's death in the State penitentiary. Dr. Ralling read the item eagerly. A shaded light which threw its rays straight down and cast a dim glow about the room illuminated the study.

"Death was due," ran the account, "to heart failure, according to the investigation held this morning. The prisoner was perfectly normal when seen about nine o'clock last night. A careful examination of the body showed that death was caused by nothing other than natural causes. Lankford was to be electrocuted Friday morning, having been convicted of murder in the first degree at the last term of court."

Dr. Ralling laid the paper aside. Silence reigned, save for the ticking of a small clock on the mantel. Occasionally the cut-out of an automobile sounded from the street or the distant wail of a locomotive was faintly audible.

Suddenly a knock sounded at the door. Dr. Ralling started and sat upright.

"Come in," he called.

The door opened slowly. Before him stood Amos Lankford. Even in the dim light Dr. Ralling recognized him instantly. He tried to cry out—the words stuck in his throat.

"Lankford!" he gasped.

The form in the doorway seemed to nod slightly.

The answer seemed to paralyze the doctor for a moment. Then with a quick motion he reached into his pocket and brought forth a small phial, similar to the one given Lankford. The liquid in this container, however, was of a brown color. Placing it to his lips, he swallowed quickly. A moment later he slumped forward in the chair.

"That's just how it happened," he concluded to the officer. "When I opened the door he looked at me like I was a ghost. He said something, and then jerked the bottle out of his pocket and drank what was in it. Must have been terrible; he was dead when I got to him. My name? Lankford is my name—Adrian Lankford. I understand Dr. Ralling visited my brother at the penitentiary a couple of days before he died."

Next Week's Complete Novelette will be

THE WAY OF THE MISSISSIPPI. By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

whose stories of this famous river have always won high favor with our readers.

The Bird of Passage

By JOHN SCHOOLCRAFT

Author of "Let the Wedding Wait," etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FRAME-UP.

KITTY came back from her ride earlier than usual. She watered Daisy at the trough, washed the bits, rubbed the mare down with a wisp of straw, cleaned the stirrups and leather, went through all the ritual which her father had taught her from start to finish, and still did not go up to the house. Instead she tiptoed through the barn and stopped in the yard behind it, listening intently for some sound from the tin house, where she knew Springtime was at work.

Kitty reckoned that in her long life of twenty-one years she had seen almost every kind of male there was: the kind that sat on porches and played ukeleles, the kind that always wanted to hold hands the first day of meeting, the serious ones who planned to be of service to the community—young lawyers mostly, with their eyes on a village office—even lads from distant metropolises who came to spend a week in Napoleon, and upon seeing her, decided to make it a month.

Clerks, farmers, young merchants, collegians—they had all passed under her rather scornful eye and left her so untouched that she had begun to feel that perhaps she was to go through life without ever feeling the delicious pain of love. And in spite of the fact that she was perfectly certain that there was something about Springtime which she had never before seen in a human being—something enthralling, mysterious, she still did not know that the queer

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 30.

hammering of her heart which his presence caused was due to any other reason than that he was "different."

It was the first time in her life that she had tried to make an occasion for seeing any male human being. She switched her riding boots for a minute or two, then walked to the door of the tin shed and lifted the sliver out of the hasp. She considered it gravely for a moment, then saw what relation it bore to her father's scheme and giggled. She swung open the door and looked in, but Springtime was so intent on his wrongs that he did not see her.

The sight of the big man glaring at the harmless beans on the floor was funny to Kitty, but at the same time something caught her by the throat and choked her laughter, for she knew how strong was the pull of the open road, even if she had never been on it. Her sharpened intuition told her that this true traveler felt cribbed and confined in a shed full of beans, and as she stepped over the threshold her sympathy struggled for utterance, but the best she could do was:

"Is my old dad here?"

Springtime saw the open door first, and getting up, took three long strides toward it. That brought him face to face with Kitty and he stared into her face, suddenly remembering the whole episode of the porch which had gone so completely out of his mind that he had forgotten all about Kitty and her queer poems. He looked at her and smiled, for Kitty in brown boots, tan linen riding habit and small, brown hat, was as pleasant to look at as she had been in the gold-colored sweater and sport skirt.

He looked quickly past her, however, to the door, and said: "Don't close the door. It has a latch on it that snaps shut. Your dad forgot when he went out and locked it. It gives a guy a terrible feeling to be locked up in a place like this."

Kitty nodded and said: "*I* know. It must be terrible."

Springtime ran his hands through his hair and breathed deeply of the breeze that swept in through the opened door.

"Was it locked?" asked Kitty.

"It sure was."

At the serious harassed expression on his face Kitty felt nothing but sympathy—a sympathy so deep and keen that instinctively she fought against it. It was something new and puzzling, and the only thing to do was to find a defense in the bantering, boyish manner with which she habitually met her father.

"How did you know?" she asked with the same glint in her eye that Springtime had often seen in her father's. "Did you try to run away?"

"I did try the door a couple of times. It wouldn't open."

"I wonder what he can be up to now?" she said, looking down at her boot tip. "I wonder what he has up his sleeve?" and at her words Springtime was instantly alert, for every hobo instinct in him sensed danger.

"Who?" he asked casually. "Your father?"

"Yes. It seems queer that he should lock you in here. There was a piece of wood through the staple of the door, so that it could not be opened except from the outside. That was queer."

It was a part of Springtime's instinct to run when danger threatened, just as it is a part of the ostrich's instinct to put his head in the sand. At sight of a copper, run; when the word jail is even thought of, run, unless you happen to be the kind of a stiff who likes to spend the winter in a good county jail. He moved toward the door without even saying good-by, but Kitty laid her crop on his forearm and he stopped dead and looked down at her. She was flushed, but her eyes and lips and chin were steady.

"I couldn't possibly let you escape," she said; "if dad wanted you locked in here, it certainly wouldn't be right for me to let you out."

Springtime glanced at the slender bamboo stick touching his arm, looked out through the barn to where freedom lay, and back into her face.

"That's right, isn't it?" said Kitty. "I would have to scream or hit you with a brick or something if you started to run, wouldn't I?"

Springtime felt as though he were [illegible] by a thread as thin as cobweb and as strong as steel, shook his head helplessly.

"Don't you like this work?"

"Like it! Oh, my good gosh!"

Kitty laughed—a warm, sympathetic laugh, and applying a bit of pressure to the riding crop, moved her captive back inch by inch until he was standing near his old place by the peck measures. Something was disturbing the wild goose on the lawn, for he was cackling and hissing and making a row that would have driven Tom Osborne to murder. Springtime waved his hand helplessly and said: "That's me. He wants to get out, and so do I."

"Don't you think it," said Kitty with another laugh, in which there was no sympathy. "He'll never leave as long as the cornmeal holds out. His wanting to be up in the cold sky is all bluff."

"What does your dad want to do with me, anyway?" asked Springtime cautiously. "What is he up to? Why does he lock me up in this tin shed with all these darned beans? He did something for me; took me to a bonesetter and had my back fixed and gave me a place to sleep, and he's been white about a lot of other things, and I'm willing to do something for him to pay it back—that is, something within reason. I told him so, and he brings me down here to work on beans! I can't stick it!"

"Why not?" asked Kitty.

"Well, I can't, that's all! I have other things to do!"

"What other things? I'm asking because I might be able to help."

"Well, it doesn't matter!" blustered Springtime. "I won't stay any longer than I want to stay. Just as soon as I feel like drifting I drift, that's all. If he had given me something decent to do I would have done it, but I'm darned if I don't think all bets are off when he puts me on a job like this one. When I get ready I go!"

There was something in Kitty's look that made his words seem hollow even to himself—as though there were an echo somewhere that had the laugh on him and was mocking him. He was whistling to keep his courage up; something fatal and prophetic whispered that there was trouble ahead, and if it had not been for that slim riding crop he would have been out and away.

"I wouldn't be too sure about that," said Kitty quietly. "Dad has more tricks than one up his sleeve. Something is in the air—I don't know what it is, but I'm guessing that it's about the bullet holes in the top of the machine. I know he had a long talk with Mr. McCabe. The chief asked him a lot of questions, and he answered some of them. You're probably under observation."

Cold wave after cold wave went up Springtime's back and the sweat stood out on his forehead. His start toward the door was a pure reflex action, as unconscious as would have been the winking of his eye if Kitty had thrust her riding crop at it. Again she laid the bamboo across his arm and he stopped dead.

"You can't escape while I am here," she said firmly. "After I'm gone you can do anything you can, but not now."

"Under observation!" gasped Springtime. "Slim McCabe! Oh, my Lord!"

"Yes," said Kitty as quietly as before. "Dad told me all about the affair, and while you must believe that I don't for one second think you had the slightest connection with it, you will have to admit that there would be some justice in—well, in suspecting you. You saw my father go to the bank and get some securities and you rode with him to Hanover and there you looked into a window just in time to see him putting thirty-eight hundred dollars in his pocket. When dad comes home it is dark and you have had plenty of time between seeing those notes and dark to spread the glad news that Tom Osborne was driving home loaded with bank notes."

"Dream on!"

"I'm not dreaming. I'm telling you how it would look. There never was a squarer man than my dad, and there never was a man who would be slower to suspect anybody falsely, or quicker to help any one he thought was being falsely accused. But he is sure bad medicine on law-breakers, and he'll move heaven and earth to get that holdup man. You can be sure he'll investigate everything and everybody. Now I'll tell you how the rest of it could look. He starts back home, and there is a barricade where never a barricade grew before, and that makes him slow down. There is the road agent, and when dad

pulls his own gun, you lean across him, and shout: 'He's got a gun!' See? Warning the holdup man!"

"That's what he thinks!" breathed Springtime, horror struck. "I was telling your dad that the crook had a gun!"

Kitty nodded.

"Oh, I don't believe for a second that you were warning the holdup man; I'm just telling you how it would all sound to an officer. As I said, you shout that and lean across dad and turn out the lights in the road so that he can't see your pal there in the road, and you knock the gun from his hand. The other man fires, and the only thing that saves dad is the fact that there is a little downhill slope there, so that when he steps on the car, he's doing fifty within a hundred yards."

Springtime rolled his eyes as though he had been struck on the head with a blackjack. He sat down weakly and said: "You don't believe all that!"

"Of course *I* don't!"

"But does he?"

"I don't know just how much he does believe," lied Kitty. "He hasn't told me."

As the next figure in the drama sprang into his vision Springtime wet his lips and got to his feet again.

"Does McCabe?"

"Nobody knows. I heard just a little of what dad said and I know he didn't tell him everything just as I have told it to you."

Springtime sat down again, dazzled by the perfection of the frame-up. It unfolded itself in flashes—one bursting rocket after the other, each one perfect in itself, and each one helping to make the whole scheme perfect. If the cleverest man in the world had deliberately sat down to concoct a scheme which was to incriminate him, he could not possibly have created as good a one.

As the mental sky cleared after the last rocket burst, Springtime got up and said firmly: "There's just one thing for me to do and that is to beat it. I'm sorry, but there has been more than one man sent up the river on slighter evidence than that!"

Kitty shook her head. Womanlike, she was enjoying the game, and enjoying the perfection of the net, the more that while it was so perfect, it was harmless.

"You aren't guilty," she said; "I know it, and my dad knows it—away down in his heart. You *couldn't* be guilty—after the way that little boy looked at you, as though you had pulled him out of a river or something. If you stay right here, everything will come out all right, but if you go McCabe will broadcast the country with pictures of you"—a quotation from the talk of her father—"and you'd be hunted. If you slipped away now dad would spend every cent he has to get you back, just as a matter of principle, and Mr. McCabe is terribly efficient. A few years ago this town was infested with tramps—you couldn't walk a block without having some one stop you and beg for money. But he cured all that."

"Yes," said Springtime, "I've heard about him."

He turned away from her, forlorn, scared, yet perfectly aware that he was caught as neatly as any fly in any web. His future lay in the palm of Tom Osborne's hand—he was not especially angry with him for it, because it was only human nature, in the world in which he had lived, for one man to take advantage of a hold he might have over another.

"I wouldn't worry," said Kitty gently. "I don't see why you should think that life here would be so hard—for a while. I've known my dad now for twenty years, man and boy, and I've never known him to do a mean thing. He either likes people a lot or doesn't like them at all, and unless I don't know the signs, he took a great fancy to you right off the bat. If he has it in his head that you ought to stay here, I'd stay, and believe me, above all things, I wouldn't drift without saying something to him about it. That would be bad news for everybody. Why do you have to go, anyway?"

"I have to—that's all," said Springtime.

"Why?"

"I don't know—I do, and there's nothing else to it. I get fed up with places—and when I get fed up I simply have to shift."

"Nonsense!" said Kitty. "Everybody feels that way once in a while. There isn't a man in the world who doesn't want to leave

[illegible] of his job in a factory. What would happen if everybody moved when things didn't go quite right and they wanted a change? I feel that way hundreds of times—seems as though this little town were choking the life out of me, but it's my job to stay here and help entertain my dad, and I do it. It wouldn't be so hard," added Kitty, lowering her eyes, "if you'd stay and help."

Springtime looked hard at her and his heart thumped.

"Would you like to have me stay?"

Kitty met his eyes bravely.

"Yes—I would. We need another man around the place. I do the best I can to help dad, but try as I will, I can't *like* prize fights. If he had you here to go with and talk about right hooks, he'd be happy as a clam."

"But these," said Springtime, indicating the beans, "I'll go plumb crazy if I have to do another bean!"

"They're nothing," answered Kitty as she flicked them about the floor with her riding crop. "All they take is patience."

"Don't say that again! Your dad told me the same thing, and if anybody else says it to me I'll slam him, that's all! You try it and see if you think it's so easy."

Kitty sank to the floor, scraped up several double handfuls of loose beans, peered into the two measures to see which was to hold the good and which the bad, and spent a few minutes getting each into the condition which it was intended to have. When everything was shipshape about her, she took up a handful of the unculled ones, and opening her palm flat, looked at them for a split second. Then—snick! The white fingers flew and a pair of dark ones hopped into the measure meant for their reception while the handful of good ones went to their reward. Fascinated, Springtime watched as the white hands flew and the patter of beans sounded like the fall of rain. When she had worked five minutes she spread out her hands and said: "See how easy it is?"

"Don't stop!" he begged. "I haven't done any to-day, and when your father comes in he'll give me one bad time. Just go right along—you don't know how well you look doing it."

"All right," said Kitty, "I'm glad to help. But you tell me about Johnny. I'm eaten up with curiosity to know about him. Where did he ever come from?"

"I wish I knew," said Springtime with feeling. "The little devil won't tell me."

"He won't?"

"No. He's cagey and he doesn't want to go home. He used to belong to an old acrobat named Bender, and Bender got so sick he knew he would never get well. That boy's a gold mine—he'd make a wonderful pickpocket, and he can sing and do a shuffle and a thousand things. Bender wanted him to go back home and grow up like a regular boy and he asked me to take him. I said I would, but I lost track of him, and a couple of stiffs got away with him. I got him back, and now the little rascal won't tell me where he lives, so that I can take him home. I can't beat it out of him."

Kitty's fingers had stopped working, and she was staring out of wide eyes into his face.

"And that big brute," she said slowly, "who was wrestling—and that wicked old man who made him play two checker games at once, they were the ones that stole him away from you. And you were fighting to get him back. I *knew* it—that big animal was fighting to kill, and that was why. I saw about a minute of it and I couldn't stand any more. Oh, my goodness!" And her unswerving eyes began to overflow.

The big tears trickled down her cheeks and splashed on her outstretched palm, while Springtime, feeling spellbound, could only stand still and stammer: "There! Everything's all right!"

After an indefinite period Kitty wiped her eyes on her sleeve as a boy might have done and began to flick the beans out of her palm.

"Oh, my gosh, don't do that!" said Springtime in a hollow voice.

"What?" whispered Kitty.

"Those damned things! Leave them alone!"

"I don't mind," she answered in a stronger voice, "and I think I ought to be a shining example. It really isn't hard. I'll show you how to do it if you want me to."

Springtime got down on the floor, and as his proximity to Kitty increased, so the warmth and radiance of the billow that surrounded them increased. The color had come back into her face now—a deep, rosy flush that reminded him of Johnny. He watched her fingers fly and then filled his own hand and tried it, but hopping beans instantly surrounded him and he threw up his hands.

"There," he said between laughter and rage, "see how they act for me?"

Kitty did not laugh, but demonstrated patiently.

"You take too many at a time. If you fill your hand right up, then when you open it, some fall out and when you have so many you are bound to knock out some good ones."

Springtime tried again and found that when he did as she advised he had much better luck. The beans that skipped about him could be numbered by the dozens instead of by scores. Kitty watched him and gave him another pointer.

"Spread your hand out flat—as flat as you can."

Springtime obeyed and found that it was still easier. After a few minutes of careful concentration, he found that he could actually take a handful of unculled beans and get them into their proper measures without losing one. When he had got that far, Kitty dusted her hands and got up from the floor.

"Ouch!" she said. "It does make your shoulders ache!"

"Don't go," pleaded Springtime as he saw the deep golden haze beginning to pale just as it had on the porch. "I won't do a lick more unless I have you here to cheer me on." Kitty shook her head and went [illegible] try to escape—if I leave the door unlocked?"

"I reckon not," said Springtime; "I'm caught."

"That's wise," said Kitty; "you trust to dad and everything will be all right, but if you try to double-cross him—" She drew her finger across her throat and made a sound suggestive of cutting throats.

"About this Johnny," she said. "We certainly ought not to let a lad like that stop us. How much do you know about where he lives?"

"It's a white house with an iron dog in the front yard and it's in Ohio State somewhere. And the town has a ball team. That's all I know."

"H-m, that ought to be enough! How about letting the old sleuth take a whirl at getting him home? The old sleuth being me."

"Fine!" said Springtime. "Fine! Fly to it—I'll give you my blessing."

"Well, there ought to be some way," said Kitty. "Women are all natural born detectives. Wait until I put mother on this case—she'll get it out of him some way or another."

"I'd hate to have her after me," said Springtime, who had never been able to get over a cold chill whenever he was in Mrs. Osborne's presence. "How much does she know about—everything?"

"Just enough," said Kitty with a confidential nod. "Dad told her a wonderful tale, and she took to Johnny as though he had been the long lost Dauphin. You wait—there will be important developments in this case before long. Good-by."

She flourished the riding crop and disappeared, and Springtime sat for a long time watching the doorway out of which she had gone. All of a sudden it seemed to be a good doorway, an excellent doorway, a king among portals. He turned back to his beans with a long sigh—nonplused by the multitude of new things that had come into his life. After a time he gave it up—it was becoming altogether too complicated. He sat down and began to pick over the beans, slowly, painfully, but with his palm stretched out flat as Kitty had advised. Suddenly he heard a snicker, and looked up to see Johnny standing in the doorway, who was doubled up with laughter.

"Look at him," said Johnny; "look at the hard guy! Oh, boy!"

Springtime was after him like a flash and caught him as he was going into the barn. He dragged him back into the shed and shut the door. Johnny was almost helpless from laughter, and even though Springtime shook

[illegible] laughter brought home to Springtime just where he stood and the knowledge made him almost crazy.

"Lay off that; kid," he hissed, "or I'll skin you alive!"

Johnny did stop, and Springtime let him go.

"Now," he said grimly, "I'll give you just ten seconds to tell me where you live! I've got to leave this damn town and I can't until I know where to take you. This time you kick in, as sure as God made apples!"

Johnny cast a furtive glance at the door.

"One," said Springtime, taking such a handful of the boy's coat that there was no chance of his escape, "two, three, four—"

"Cheese it," said Johnny earnestly. "Springtime, I've got some big news for you."

"Five, six, seven—"

"Honest to God," whispered Johnny, looking around, "some real big stuff. You don't want to pick beans, do you? Well, you've got to if the old man says the word. Now, I can get you out of this if you'll just lay off the rough stuff. There's one thing the old man wants done, and you can do it for him. I ain't wise to everything yet, but I'm getting wise."

"Eight," said Springtime, and stopped. He glared into the upturned face of the boy.

"This is straight?" he said. "If I find you've been fooling me I sure will tan you!"

"Straight as hell!" said Johnny solemnly. "And there might be a little jack in it for somebody if it was worked right."

"Spill it—what is it?"

"Didn't I tell you I couldn't tell just now—to-morrow maybe, or the next day, when I get more dope. Now just lay off me. I don't blame you for being sore at this job, but that's no reason why you should pick on a poor kid about a third your size."

Springtime let go, and Johnny backed away and smoothed himself down. He still had the dark blue knickerbocker suit which the Professor had bought him for the checker match, and he was taking great care of his appearance now that he was living in good society. He nodded mysteriously and went to the door.

"It's good stuff," he said; "good stuff!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ALL KNOWLEDGE.

SPRINGTIME worked for almost a straight hour the next morning, but at the end of that time he simply had to get up and look out of the window, and once out of his chair the effort of getting back to it was beyond him. The schoolboy dragging himself to school with reluctant feet was a race horse compared to Springtime, and when he did pull himself back to his work, it was with the painful exertion of the runner dragging himself over the last ten yards to the tape. Once down he worked in spasmodic bursts, and finally got up in such a rage that he kicked over a measure of beans.

"Why the hell I do this I don't know!"

Pulling the chair up against the bin he sat down to sulk. At noon he was still in the chair, tipped against the bin. Osborne made no adverse comment on seeing him, but ran his hands through what beans he had done and said: "That's better; you're developing a fielding eye." When he had gone Johnny slipped in and stood inside the door, so that he could watch the pathway leading to the shed.

"I've got the dope, Springtime; the real doughnuts. Now if you can get away with this the old guy 'll give you a house and lot and you'll never have to pick another bean as long as you live."

Johnny peered out again.

"Can you pitch?" he asked.

"No."

"That's bad. That's bad. I had an idea you could, but maybe we can work it some other way. Do you reckon you could get a good pitcher somewhere?"

"Look here, kid, spill it. You're just flapping in the wind now."

"This guy Osborne," said Johnny, "he's a magnate—baseball magnate. He's got a team here and he's got his mouth all set for beating another team at that burg of Hanover. You know how these little towns are,

Springtime; they just naturally tear each other to pieces over a baseball championship. This last series they played this summer came out a tie, but each one claimed it was all wrong because each had got a decision that was bad and lost a game on it. Well, the old boy told me that they decided to play one post season game to settle it, and right at the last minute the old boy's pitcher walks away and doesn't come back. He's darn near crazy now, and I have a hunch that the man who got him a pitcher could have the world and half this township.

"I sat down in a store while he was chinning about it and I got the whole layout—years ago they didn't have nothing but home talent, and sure it must have been a scream to see these hicks playing at being ball players. Then about five years ago, according to the old man's story, a stranger appears on this Hanover team, and that year Hanover won hands down. But the next year old Osborne had a stranger of his own, and since then I guess it's been a case of who could buy the most players. Just between you and me I think there's been some dirty work at the crossroads and that that Hanover gang has bought up that pitcher.

"But here's the point, old-timer. You and me go out and get a pitcher that 'll win, and that guy 'll let you off on the bean picking, give us a gold watch apiece, and probably ask you to marry the jane. There's hundreds of good ball players hitting the road this time of year—guys that's been playing with factory teams all summer, and now the season's over, they've been let out. It's a pipe!"

Springtime whistled.

"Son, you're a walrus. Just leave this to me. I'll catch the old boy after lunch."

Osborne smoked a pipe at the stable after each and every meal, and when he had settled down to it Springtime said lightly: "Sure, I'd like to see a ball game."

A spurt of blue smoke told him he had registered, but Osborne gave no other sign for five minutes. Then he took his pipe from his mouth and said: "Do you play?"

"No—that is, not much."

Another silence, broken at length by Osborne's saying: "I'd give my front teeth to find a good pitcher."

Springtime yawned.

"Maybe I could find you one."

"Ah-huh. Where?"

"Oh, along the road. I've seen everything in the jungles—doctors, lawyers, college boys, painters, crooks, and I've seen some of 'em playing ball around the yards. There are a lot of drifters that play ball with factory teams. They get a good job while the season lasts with nothing to do but sign the pay roll and play ball once a week. Then when the season's over they drift. I bet I could pick up a good one in a week or so."

"I'm darned if I see," said Osborne slowly, "why I set so much store by one picayune ball game, but I feel that if Hanover walked away with that pennant I could never look my family in the face again. I'm a small-towner, and I reckon every small-towner figures his place is about heaven and New York combined, plus a dash of the Garden of Eden. That Hanover bunch ought to be trimmed, and I'd give my right arm to see them get it."

"Well, I might be able to get a pitcher who'd do it if it's going to be a pitcher's battle. Of course, you can't tell. It probably wouldn't be worth the trouble."

"The hell it wouldn't! How much would a guy like that want?"

"Oh, fifty and expenses would get the best in the world."

Osborne opened a wallet and peeled off a couple of bills, laid them on the window sill and got up.

"See what you can do," he said as he walked away, "only be sure to bring him back here—that's all."

"Sure!" said Springtime, trying in vain to keep the delight out of his voice. "You don't need a band, do you? I could pick up a good band and they would come for their expenses. You might have to find instruments for them."

"No," said Osborne, shaking his head, "I have a band."

"Or an umpire?" asked the wanderer, putting the bills away in his pocket. "I could probably get a first-class umpire."

"You get a pitcher and you'll have done

your share," said Osborne, "and be sure you *bring* him back *here*."

Springtime felt the threat under the last words—the threat of what would happen to him if, once on the road, he let his feet run away from him. But if he were successful in getting a pitcher for the old man, it *must* mean that he would take him out of the bean house for good. Springtime's mind simply would not think of how long it would take to do forty bushels of beans at the rate he had been going. Life simply wasn't long enough. Osborne got up and knocked the ashes out of the pipe, and Springtime rose with him, his spirits going up like a hot air balloon.

"I take it the boy 'll stay here," said Osborne. "I had a chin with the missis about him this morning. She says we've all been on the wrong track with him by trying to force him to tell where he used to live. She reckons the universe is run by love, and she's going to get it out of him thataway. Now's as good a time as any, when you ain't around to throw out the currents."

Springtime laughed and threw his arms up above his head.

"You hang onto him, then," he answered. "I'll sneak it out without letting him see me go. It's a dirty trick to play on a poor, unsuspecting boy, but it ain't half of what he's done to me. So-long!"

"Excuse me, but just when will you be back?"

"When I get a pitcher."

"One week from to-day?"

"Right you are, chief."

Springtime stepped out into the alley gingerly—as though his good luck were so fragile that he did not dare to test it. But as the certainty grew in him that he was free, he began to run—to run as though the bean shed had taken legs and was pursuing him.

For three glorious days he roamed, senselessly and magnificently drunk on the sense of freedom. In his pocket he carried a baseball, and at every jungle, or hangout, he took it out and began to toss it in the air or bounce it against the side of a building. That was sure to bring out somebody who wanted to play catch, and it did not take Springtime long to see whether or not the man on the other end had anything on the ball. The weather was golden October; the brakemen were so kind that they almost helped him on and off trains; he had money, and he slept and fed like the king of the road realm that he was. Now that the tide was released Springtime felt how strong it had been and under what pressure he had been while a prisoner in the galvanized iron shed.

He found one man with speed and another with curves, but one was a shallow-headed lad and the other a middle-aged man with unmistakable signs of dipsomania upon him. On the third day he came to a good-sized town, and while looking for a fair hotel, he passed a small park, on the edge of which an orator on a soap box was talking violently. The American flag covered the railing on which his grimy hand lay, but from his vehement manner Springtime judged that what he was saying was thinly veiled Americanism.

There is no place in the world where political opinions are more violent than in Hoboland, and Springtime had heard and seen good arguments on the subject of property from men who never owned more than a dollar's worth of anything at any one time in their lives. He stopped to listen, and as he turned away he saw that an opposition orator had opened—a tall, thin man, who stood on his box and looked fixedly under his hand at some mysterious point in the sky. About him were a half dozen loungers, also peering at the sky, and as the contagion of curiosity increased people began to drift over from the vehement orator to the star-gazer.

Springtime was among them, Springtime smothering laughter that would not be smothered, for the new orator was Durkin. Whatever his graft might be, it was bound to be worth watching, and Springtime pushed himself forward until he was under the tall man's nose. When Durkin withdrew his eye suddenly from that mysterious point in the sky the first man [illegible] upon was his old friend Springtime; the second man he saw was the constable, who was on hand to see that nothing was said or done that violated a city ordinance. Knowing that there must be some sort of city rule

against begging or taking up collections for personal purposes, Springtime wondered what Durkin could have to say. That constable had not been able to make anything out of the political economy jabber of the other orator, and he was roaming with hostile eye.

"Friends," said Durkin, suddenly bringing his hand out in a graceful sweep, "I'm here to answer any and all questions that you may have to offer. Any question on any subject, and I will give you an answer—a correct answer. Politics, science, religion, languages, history—anything! Now who wants to ask the first question?" He leaned forward and said in a sort of jail whisper, without moving his lips: "Start 'em off, Springtime, and ask me how far it is from the earth to the sun."

"Sure," said the other in the same sort of voice and asked aloud: "How far is it from the earth to the sun?"

"Ninety-two million eight hundred and thirty thousand miles," said Durkin, rolling out the numbers as though he were calling a list of stations on a railroad. "Ninety-two million eight hundred and thirty thousand. What's next?"

Since the crowd, while interested, had not yet shown any inclination to take part in the game, Springtime asked another question: "How big is it?"

"The sun," said Durkin, "has a diameter of eight hundred and sixty-four thousand miles."

"How big is the earth?" asked a voice, and Durkin answered with the same unctuous rolling out of big figures. "The earth upon which we live is eight thousand and odd miles in diameter."

"How big around?"

"Twenty-four thousand. You can figure that for yourself, friend, for the circumference of any circle is two *pi* times the radius. Next question!"

"What's socialism?" asked a voice, and the laugh that followed told that most of Durkin's audience had come from the neighboring congregation.

"Socialism," said Durkin without a pause, "can best be defined by a story. Two Irishmen were talking politics, and one said to the other: 'Pat, what's socialism?' 'Socialism,' said Pat, 'means that if I have two million dollars I give you one million.' 'Well,' said the other, 'does that mean that if you have two pigs, you give me one of them?' 'Go long wid yes,' said Pat, 'you know I have two pigs!' Next question? Come along, friends, shake it up. Here, I'll give you a few facts. Does anybody here know what the national debt of Czecho-Slovakia is? No? It is fifty million seven hundred and thirty-eight thousand eight hundred and sixty-two kronen, figuring exchange at normal. Didn't know that, did you? What is the proportion of suicides in the sexes? Don't know? Three times as many men kill themselves as women—there's a reason somewhere."

"Hey," said a small, bald-headed man in an office coat, "what's the weight of wire in the Brooklyn Bridge?"

"Eight thousand and odd tons," said Durkin smoothly, "and the odd is four hundred and thirty-two and a fraction."

The questions came thick and fast now—Durkin could not answer them all, but he picked them here and there and gave a quick and clean reply. Neither did he ignore any question that was persistently asked.

"What's the tallest building? How tall is it? How high is the Woolworth Building? How high is it? What's the world's biggest city? The biggest passenger ship? Which of these two men shall I vote for?"

At the last question Durkin took the lithographed poster out of the hand of a man who had been waving it under his nose and held it up so that the crowd could see it.

It showed pictures of opposition candidates for city treasurer. Springtime thought that Durkin must be stumped by that; but there was no alarm in the man's face, and he did not hesitate a moment.

"What the office needs is a man not afraid to do his duty—a man familiar with figures—a man not to be influenced by favor, interest, or fortune. One might say that in some respects Henry was a better man than Glasgow; but that does not necessarily mean that a man in voting for Glasgow would throw his ballot away. Glasgow is a good man, as men go; we mustn't ask for perfection in these days.

for the reason that we won't get it. Personally, I favor the right-hand one; but cast your ballot for the man according to your conscience. Either that or toss for it."

He passed the telegraph back quickly and clapped his hands together.

"Next question!"

They came thick as hail, and Springtime, almost doubled with laughter, listened to Durkin, who for a quarter of an hour kept up a stream of answers, some of them accurate, all of them crisp; and when he was fairly pinned he managed to wriggle out under cover of a joke of some sort. By this time the earnest gentleman on the opposition box had no audience at all, for they all had crowded to Durkin, and when he saw them at the height of their numbers and good nature, he put out his hand and said:

"Is there anybody here who would like to contribute to the cause?"

"What cause?" asked a voice in the silence that followed.

"Oh, any cause," said Durkin without moving a muscle of his face. "I am taking contributions for the cause—that is, my assistant is taking them."

"Easy," cautioned Springtime. "the bull's onto you."

The constable, as the meeting approached a stage where he would be justified in suspecting the speaker of being a plain beggar, had crowded forward until he stood almost at Durkin's feet.

"This gentleman here," said Durkin, pointing to Springtime, "will pass among you with his hat off, and while it is against the law of this city for me to take a collection, he will try to catch any money that seems to be floating in the air in his hat. You may be sure that that money will go to the *cause!*"

Springtime, with a look at the nonplused constable, took off his hat, and holding it out, began to circulate through the crowd, which had seen the joke and was responding nobly. Wherever he walked a ripple of laughter followed him, and almost every one gave something—from a penny up—for the quarter of an hour of amusement which Durkin had afforded them. Springtime came back to Durkin with his cap heaping with small change, and the tall man, with a nod of thanks to the ten who lingered, poured the money into his pockets, got down and walked away through the park with an affable nod to the constable. Springtime walked with him, with an occasional side glance of wondering admiration. This exquisite half hour came as a beautiful climax to his three wonderful days of wandering.

At a restaurant door Durkin stopped, slipped his arm through that of his companion, and led him in. He took off his hat and ran his hand over the brow that sheltered so many mysteries and sighed.

"Steak, eggs, coffee, hot cakes, pie," he said. "You eat, boy."

"Durk," said Springtime after the waitress had gone to the kitchen, "how do you do it? I thought I had a nerve, but you—"

"It wasn't so bad, was it?" said Durkin. "I was hungry, son, and hunger is the mother of invention. I spent about four hours in the public reading room going through the big almanac, and then came out primed. The hicks asked just about what I thought they would, although they almost had me stopped a couple of times. You know, ever since Roller left me, I've been more or less put to it."

"Ah," said Springtime, "I thought he wouldn't stand for that walloping."

"Springtime," said Durkin, "have you no faith in human nature? Have you no ideals? It wasn't the walloping that did it—it was my example in quitting. I've never done anything that Roller didn't try to do; but he always sticks to it and puts it across. My going home started him to think about it, and I'm darned if one morning he didn't up and leave me, saying he was going back to his home town, which I believe he called Snakewood. He went, and I haven't seen or heard of him since, and I don't imagine that I shall see or hear of him. He'll stick. I've had to think pretty fast now and then about getting things to eat. What kind of a grait are you on? But wait, don't answer now, for I don't think I can give you the undivided attention you deserve while all this food is in front of me."

There was silence for a time while Durkin ate; then, at the end, when he had sent to the cashier's desk for a package of cigarettes, and had one of them between his lips, he waved his hand to his companion, and Springtime said: "I'm looking for a baseball pitcher."

"So?" said Durkin. "What kind of a pitcher?"

"Good one. Minor league stuff."

He outlined the situation that existed at Napoleon, gave him a brief description of Napoleon, but omitted Kitty and the beans. Durkin listened thoughtfully, and at the end was silent until they had left the restaurant and found a seat near the cannon in the park. Then Durkin, upon whom Springtime's narrative seemed to have made a profound effect, asked, "How much is there in that pitching job?"

"Fifty and keep. The game comes off in a week or so."

"Fifty and keep," said the other meditatively, and after a long, thoughtful pause, spread his hands out before Springtime.

"See those hands?"

"Sure I do, and if I were a bull, I would say that they had never done any hard work."

"No; but those two broken fingers came from baseball."

"From baseball!" exclaimed Springtime. "Durk, I always figured you for an Englishman—a duke or something without a belfry to ring in."

"I've lived there off and on," said Durkin; "but, boy, I'm a blowed-in-the-glass Yank, and once upon a time I was the captain of a team."

"Where?"

Durkin politely ignored that question, but said: "It was a pretty good team, too. I've gone south with the robins in spring; but I never came back north."

When all this information had penetrated, and Springtime saw its implications, he was acutely embarrassed. He was bound to Durkin by class loyalty and a sincere admiration for the great man's qualities. Hobo might be against hobo, but hoboes together against the world, and he felt that Durkin would be justified in expecting him to turn over the pitching graft to himself, whether he could win or not. At the same time he felt doubts as to Durkin's ability to stick, and this job needed some one who could pitch and who would stick, for even if he did not owe an unmixed loyalty to Osborne, he was more or less afraid of double-crossing the old man.

"Gee, Durk," he said, "would you stick?"

Durkin said not a word or made a movement to indicate that he had heard; after they had chatted about other things for an hour, he got up and said, "We'll be drifting, son. You may have to cover a lot of ground before you find that pitcher."

Springtime had thought those three days preceding his meeting with Durkin as being a glimpse of Paradise, but they were nothing to the three that came after, when, with the weather still kind, the brakeman even more courteous, and money still in his pocket, he found all his former pleasure doubled by the presence of Durkin.

The tall man had an instant appreciation of everything humorous or interesting that ran along with his own. In addition he was the pink of courtesy and kindness in all the little amenities which make hobo life as well as drawing-room life possible. He was thoughtful, unselfish, polite, almost to exaggeration, and Springtime understood how it was that Roller had stood for his laziness for so many years. It was worth supporting Durkin just to be with him; he paid, not with the sweat of his brow, but the finer coin of his gentility. Deep in his heart Springtime began to feel that he had found his pal—the man with whom he could spend the rest of his days wandering from Bangor to Melbourne.

At the end of the third day he had found no one, and he began to be a bit worried. When he had left Osborne it had seemed the simplest thing in the world to go out and lay his hand on a better pitcher than any that had ever hurled for Napoleon; but he found that for some mysterious reason or other baseball players were extremely scarce in the jungles. He found everything else, from dry point etchers to inventors of wave machines; but no ball players worthy of the name. Durkin saw his worry, and at the end of an unsuccessful

reached the more it dropped, and he missed it in the end. He passed it back to Dorin...

...a long distance. Dorin came across to Osborne, at second, and received it. Then it had...

...ground he dashed it, and with...

...Dublin, still. "I am the...

...you with me. Dick, but if you don't...

"I'll be there, sir, then the last ball is pitched," said Dublin, with his hand on his pal's shoulder; "you and all may count that. Play down is a powerful...

...and besides, I like small men. Lead the way to this Arcadian village."

...both on his own account and on Dublin's account, but as they reached Jack Arnold Napoleon he had misgivings. Dublin was...

...he saw the tears in the...

...but it dimly that as far as pitching...

...Dublin would prefer, in the end, to...

...the diamond, he had to admit that the tall man was a real ball player.

Osborne was pleased: they arrived in the...

...Dublin with the news, at first...

...Osborne in the room, and...

...his own on from the...

...Osborne's best hand in his best...

...in the heart of the lane and had...

...it was the spell in town...

...a corner of the...

...Dublin was...

...Osborne's arm...

...Osborne's...

...Dublin was...

...Osborne's...

...Osborne's...

...Osborne's

Johnny put his hand on his forehead and thought hard.

"No, ma'am, not a thing. I just remember 'town,' if you know what I mean; but I don't remember anything *about* the town."

"Of course! I know just what you do mean, dear boy. But how about any playmates—don't you remember any Jacks, or Toms, or Harrys that you used to play with?"

"Let's see," said the lad; "let's see. Jack—no. Tom, Harry? No, ma'am. It's all gone clean out of my head."

"But you said that there was a ball team there, and my husband told me that he knew it was a white house, and that there was an iron dog in the front yard."

"Is that so? I don't remember the house and the dog, but I do remember the ball park. Sure I do! I got hit on the head out there—gee, it was a peach of a clout. It was a big day—Fourth of July, or Decoration Day, and there was such a crowd that the field was crowded and the stands full. I was standing right behind the third base line, and a low foul got me right smack on the napper."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Osborne, and Springtime and Osborne could see her stiffen. "You were struck on the head!"

"Was I? Gee, I was cold most of the day, and when I did come to, I didn't know what had happened to me. I carried a goose egg under my hat for a week!"

Mrs. Osborne held Johnny off at arm's length and ran her hand over his head. She was bristling with interest and pity.

"My poor, poor boy!"

Osborne at this juncture coughed and got into motion. His wife immediately flew to him and dragged him and Springtime off out of range of Johnny's ears.

"He *can't* remember!" she whispered. "I knew there was something strange about that boy the moment I laid eyes on him. He's not normal—his head is asymmetrical from a blow he received in childhood. What he needs is medical attention instead of a lot of bullying from two men! An operation to relieve the pressure on his brain. No wonder the poor lamb does not know where he lives!"

Springtime drew away to conceal his emotions, and Johnny slapped him in the middle of the back.

"Springtime! You snitcher! What do you mean by running away without me? Gee, I had my face all set for a spell on the rods, and then you drift and leave me behind. It ain't been so bad, though," said Johnny with an impish grin. "Gosh, this house is easy! A guy could get away with murder, wipe up the blood, bury his own dead, and never get caught. But what's the dope? Did you get a pitcher?"

"Sure I did. Durk."

"Durk!" yelled Johnny. "Good old Durk! Sure I'd like to see that guy! He's a great gun, Springtime; he's a card, and no mistake! Lead me to him."

"Lead yourself, you double-barreled little liar. I heard the stuff you were spilling to the missis! Durk's at the Railroad House."

CHAPTER XVI.

BIG SIX.

WHAT the State House Massacre is in the history of Boston; what the ringing of the Liberty Bell is in Philadelphia, that post-season game is in the chronicles of Napoleon.

The day dawned bright and clear as only October days can be. The crowd that filled the ball park contained every able-bodied man, woman, and child from all but the key industries of the two cities. Tom Osborne had secretly engaged a band from a larger neighboring city, which, with a slight alteration on caps, collars, and bass drum, became the Napoleon Premier Band.

Springtime's fears for Durkin had become somewhat softened as he had watched the pitcher working out on the diamond. That he was a good ball player there could be no doubt—and that first sense of apprehension had slowly vanished as the days went by and he saw no signs of any unsteadiness in his protégé. He and Durkin stood at the entrance to the dressing room, watching the crowd drift in, and in the tall man's eye there was just a glint of contempt as he received and returned the

position of the [illegible] batting order. Springtime, the latter looking out of the corner of his [illegible] said in a gentle tone that [illegible] five feet away, "bringing me to this town was the best thing you ever did for me."

"So?"

"Yes. What are you going to do after this game is over?"

"Darned if I know, Durk. What are you?"

"Driit, my boy—driit West. Calliiornia is a slick place for the cold months; I'm wintering there. Better come along, boy."

"I wish I could," yearned Springtime as the *wanderlust* began to well up in him. "I wish I could."

"Well, why can't you?" asked Durkin with a keen look. "Springtime, I have an idea about you, and, boy, I'm going to save you. I have an idea that jane is after you and that you're falling for it. It's all wrong, son, all wrong. Any guy that can hold down a train the way you can hasn't any business taking on family worries. Now we'll have a stake when I get through here—a good one, understand me? A good stake, something that will keep us both for most of the winter, provided we don't waste our patrimony. Understand, a good, fat stake."

Springtime looked at him and his heart seemed to turn over in his breast. There was the faintest sort of flutter to Durkin's left eyelid, and Springtime, seeing it, felt all his old apprehensions returning.

"Oh, my good gosh, Durk, what are you talking about?"

"Easy, don't spill it to the world! These [illegible] would be criminal to let 'em have it when it's crying out bitterly to get into the right hands. We'll have our share of it when the game's over."

Springtime grasped Durkin by the forearm and looked him in the eye. Durkin returned the look and nodded.

"It's this way, Springtime, the Lord made money for the people that know how to use it. You and I do and just between us, we'll make a raid on some of this boob coin. We'll stick the hicks, Springtime, just the way they would stick us if they had the chance."

"Durk," said Springtime in a whisper, "you don't throw the game."

"Keep your eye peeled and your mouth shut and you'll see I me good ball played," said Durkin. "Don't [illegible]"

Springtime looked at his cool companion in a fever of apprehension. He could understand the pitcher's position thoroughly, could see how any real hobo would feel more or less justified in skinning "scissor bills," yet for him there were so many complicating factors. Unless the game were thrown so cleverly that no possible suspicion could be entertained, the burden would fall upon him, and at the thought of the hold which Osborne had on him and what he could do with it, the cold sweat broke out upon his forehead. In addition there was Kitty who had shown almost as much interest in the game as her father.

"Don't do it!" pleaded Springtime. "Don't do it! Durk, you couldn't get away with it in a thousand years, and if anything goes wrong I get hell, that's all; just plain hell. I'm asking you as pal to pal, don't do it!"

Durkin laughed and shook his head.

"Springtime, I tell you you've gone to hell since you saw that jane. In the old days you would have slapped me on the back and cheered me on. She has you stopped, boy; your morale is all shot, and I reckon it's up to me to do a little missionary work and drag you out of here. Gee, Springtime, this is the first I ever heard of your being scared by scissor bills. Buck up, old son, and let the little fixer take care of [illegible]

Some one hailed Durkin from the dressing room, and before Springtime could get another word to him, the pitcher had slipped away under the stands. He stood for a moment, panic-stricken, wondering what he could do; then ran after Durkin, but his find was already out on the field pitching slow balls to a batter who lofted them for fielding practice. He went back and found a place alongside Osborne, wondering how he could get himself out of this scrape, if there was a scrape. There was some com-

fort in the thought that if Durkin did throw the game he would probably do it so cleverly that it could not be detected.

Hanover opened proceedings with a band of its own—not uniformed, but it had a colored conductor dressed like a minstrel man. All the uniforms that should have gone to the players had evidently been concentrated on the drum major's tall figure, and when he stood up in front of the bleachers to conduct that band, flitting, dancing, and singing in a mellow voice, there was a ripple of appreciation even from Napoleon.

But a group of grave Napoleon business men—bankers, merchants, manufacturers—had spent a quarter of an hour under the tutelage of the Episcopal rector, a man who had, in addition to his degree of divinity, a secular degree from a large Eastern university. He had taught them one of the football songs of his Alma Mater—a song that began with a long, melancholy wail, such as one hears at darky funerals. When this wail had been held for a full minute the band of sober men of business broke into the following melancholy prophecy:

"More work for the undertaker,
'Nother little job for the casket-maker,
In the local cemetery they are very, very busy
on a brand new gra-a-ve—
No hope for Hanover!"

That was a crusher for the opposition which had nothing to give in reply but a few feeble cries of: "This is a ball game, not a concert." "Give that calf more rope." Somehow or other the thing took, and the Napoleon bleachers caught it, where it rose from first one corner, then another, and pillars of churches slapped one another on the back with delight.

When the team trotted out on the field for warming up practice, no one noticed Durkin—for two or three minutes. Then some sharp-eyed lad in the Hanover section began to point and passed the word to another, and so on until every one in the enemy's stands was pointing to the stranger who, after fielding a few bunts, wrapped himself up in a sweater and began to warm up his pitching arm. Springtime could see that Durkin, even in practice, was making an impression upon the opposite side; from his own backers came encouraging cries: "Atta boy, Durk! The old shine ball!"

From Hanover came a feeble cry of "Ringer!" And at the word Tom Osborne groaned as if in agony.

"That from them!"

The presence of the new pitcher put the tin hat on an occasion already popping like the warm near-beer that was being peddled. When Durkin wound up and pitched his first slow ball there was a dead silence; that silence became funereal as one Hanover batter after another fanned the ambient air and retired to the bench.

When the half inning ended and Durkin trotted in to the bench, he was the only unmoved being among the hundreds present. Napoleon was slapping itself on the back and trying in vain to keep its seat and learn all the words to the new song; Hanover rallied to the support of its own pitcher, who went to the mound.

As Osborne had said, his team was strong on offense, and with its defense tightened by the pitching of Durkin, it really looked as though victory would perch where it was used to perch in the ages gone by—on the banner of Napoleon.

In three innings neither side scored, but when Durkin was in the box the sound of bat connecting with ball was rare, and then there were only pop-up flies to the infield. On the other hand, it was only by playing a desperate defense that Hanover kept the champing enemy from racing across the plate. One had the feeling that there was a leak in the dike and that there was only a very small boy with a small thumb to keep the tide back, and that boy was rapidly weakening.

The funeral song rose more and more often in the Napoleon stands; Kitty more and more often punched her father on the shoulder with her closed fist and asked: "Are you happy, old-timer?"

Springtime sat with his hands tightly clenched, wondering when the catastrophe was to occur. It was a great day for Johnny, who was fielding bats for the home team, and carrying on a spirited line of repartee with a stray Hanover fan who had somehow got into a seat just above the players' bench.

In the fifth the dam broke, beginning with

a low two-bagger that sailed just over the third baseman's head and fell just short of the outfielders. Durkin was on the other end of the stick, and Springtime, seeing him hesitate before getting into motion, sang out: "Beat it, Durk! The bull!" For of all the interested spectators of the game, Slim McCabe was the most interested. He lounged at the end of an aisle with his tall, raw-boned figure looming supernaturally against the glare of the field.

That cry was instinctive, but even if Durkin heard it he paid no attention. His hit seemed to surprise him so much that it took some time for him to get his long legs in motion, and when he did run, it was only the frantic yells of the coacher that drove him on to second. There he perched, safe, with the hardest hitting man on the team at bat. The net result was two runs in that inning for the home team, while the score board showed a blank for the visitors. Springtime breathed a big sigh of relief.

But in the seventh things began to happen—the dark and fatal seventh. The undertaker song proved to be a boomerang. It was easy to learn, and when, without a reason apparent to any one but Springtime, Durkin walked two men the long wail arose on the other side.

"Oh, my good gosn, said Springtime, "this is it!"

"That's the trouble with you bums," said Osborne in a panicky whisper; "you don't last!"

With two on bases and the Hanover stands howling for blood, a low liner went straight to Durkin. He fielded it easily and then dropped it, and after hunting a long time in the dust, recovered it and threw to first. It was a wild throw, a high one that no one could have got without a butterfly net. By the time the ball was back in his hands three men had raced over the plate. The catcher walked slowly out for a conference; Tom Osborne was white, and Kitty's pounding on his shoulder had changed to a patting of his hand.

Springtime looked about him with a guilty feeling and pulled his cap over his eyes, for he wanted to hide from the world the man who had introduced this viper into its trusting midst. Durkin was as cool as any cucumber that ever came out of an ice box; he took his place on the bench and wrapped a sweater about himself without a quiver, and answered the questions and advice of his teammates with the greatest coolness. Johnny was reduced to more or less mechanical remarks which he uttered in a shrill voice that could have been heard a quarter of a mile.

"Atta boy! Atta boy! Kill 'em! Eat 'em alive!"

Springtime, seeing McCabe's tall figure shifting from one foot to the other, as a standing horse does, had a flash of inspiration. As far as he could remember, Durkin had never seen the great constable, nor did he know that this was the town through which true travelers traveled in the middle of the night, with their virility numbed, no matter how great their number. He got up and made his way to a place just above Durkin where, by leaning over the rail, he could just reach down and touch the pitcher's shoulder.

Durkin got up, and Springtime said in a whisper: "Say, Durk, did you know that this was Slim McCabe's town?"

"No!" said Durkin, and even his thin, hard-muscled face blanched a little.

"Sure it is," whispered Springtime, "and he's got his heart set on winning this game!"

Durkin wiped his face with his sleeve and said "Thanks!"

When, amid the jeers of the Hanoverians, he went up to bat, he lammed out a daisy clipper, and when Springtime took his place beside Tom Osborne the strained expression on his host's face had vanished. Durkin was on third by that time, but did not get home before the inning ended.

The damage was done; heartened by their success the Hanover infield held like a stone wall, until in the last of the eighth Durkin hit a ball that seemed to take wings to itself. It rose and rose, and when it came to earth it lay outside the fence, and Durkin had clicked across the plate. In the ninth he wound up like a clock spring and pitched a ball that no one could see and held his own gains.

Springtime detached himself from the jubilee meeting outside and went into the dressing room under the stands. Durkin

was receiving the congratulations of his fellow players and of such magnates as had enough pull to force their way in, as a king would—calmly, as though it were only to be expected that he would do great things. Springtime and he glanced at one another, and in that glance was the history of the things that had happened.

"Good work," said Springtime.

And Durkin: "Thanks. Wait for me, will you, old chap? I may need some help."

They lingered until all the players had departed and the tramping of feet above them had ceased and then they left through the small gate. Durkin looked about him, and after a survey began to walk rapidly forward toward the mass of moving vehicles, behind which he might find concealment. But a tall man who looked like a respectable business man intercepted him, and glaring at him, said: "Snitcher!"

Durkin drew himself up and turned to Springtime.

"An attempt was made," he said, "to bribe me. In the interests of clean sport I thought it best to lead the emissary on, just to see how far he would go. If there is any attempt at violence, I want you to be a witness and to report the true course of events. Some money changed hands; if tainted money can be cleansed by being employed in good work this will be, for it is to be an anonymous contribution to the Star of Life Mission. And if you say another word I'll clout you!"

He swung up that mighty fist which had brought victory out of defeat, and the man who had accosted him fell back with muttered threats. Durkin did not wait for more; he stepped out briskly with Springtime in his wake and said in a clear voice: "You wouldn't believe it, old chap, but there are people who think that a man's soul could be bought and sold just like so much soap."

As always when he was with Durkin, Springtime was on the verge of the most satisfying laughter he had ever known, but that which came to his lips died.

They were approaching a road with a car track crossing it, and beside the car track, directing the traffic, stood Slim McCabe, tall, gaunt, raw-boned, with just the same sort of small, glass-green eye as Gahagan's. Under the flannel shirt his shoulders looked to be a yard wide, and in a big fist dangled a length of hickory stick, hard as iron, with just enough elasticity in it to give it the punishing power of a blackjack.

Springtime plucked Durkin by the sleeve to draw him another way so that they would not pass under the tiger's eye, but Durkin shook his head and held to his course. People leaned from machines to shout congratulations, and for each he had a nod, an apt word, or a witticism. They stopped at the edge of the roadway to let a string of cars pass, and Durkin said: "Well, Springtime, are you satisfied?"

"Sure I am, Durk. Gosh, I was sure windy for a while. You don't know how it is with me."

"It's that girl," said Durkin; "you're in a bad way, Springtime. After we get the coin, we drift, you and me."

"Sure, I'd like to," yearned Springtime, "but I can't."

"Why not?"

"Well, I can't, that's all," said Springtime, slightly ashamed at revealing the net which Osborne, the hick, had spun about him. "In a little while I can, but not now. You beat it and I'll meet you later."

"Never!" said Durkin. "With me it's all right to stick a rube, but to desert a friend—nix! I'm staying with you, son, until the last whistle blows. I know it's that jane—I knew it the minute I saw you looking at her and her looking at you. You were perched up on the bleachers there one night at practise and I saw I had a little rescue work cut out for me. I can find enough to amuse me in this town and I'll stand by and save you from her and your own hellish inclinations."

McCabe's whistle blew and the traffic stopped. He swung his stick, and Springtime and Durkin started to cross the road, and as they passed the officer the pitcher nodded.

"Good evening, constable," he said.

McCabe's granite eye softened and the hard eye relaxed.

"Hello, Big Six," said he.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

The Great and the Small

By EARL C. McCAIN

A CASUAL visitor, arriving in Salt Lake City on the morning of June 10, and unacquainted with the Anniversary Endurance Race, would have been amazed at the scene in front of Utah's great capital building. Across the wide street before the State house were lined up twenty-six horses and riders, awaiting the signal that would start them on the six-hundred-mile run to Cheyenne.

The race was to be the longest and greatest endurance contest ever held, and never had the West—in fact, the entire country—shown such interest. It marked the anniversary of the discovery of the Great Salt Lake by Captain Ridger, and so far as possible, the horses would follow the same route taken by the valiant explorer as he returned to the East.

There were reasons for the unusual interest, as well as for the great number of entries in the race. The true Westerner has two great loves peculiar to the section in which he lives: first, for the history of the country, with its dangers and hardships; and secondly, a natural love for the horse, the creature that next to man was responsible for the winning of the West.

Another reason was the large prize offered. When the race had first been proposed, the two cities at the ends of the route had each agreed to pay twenty-five thousand dollars to form a purse; but at that time the idea was in its infancy. Since then additional prizes by racing associations, newspapers, and cities along the route had been added to the original purse until it totaled more than had ever been offered on any single race.

While the horses, with more or less shifting about, stood ready to start, the Governor of Utah passed from one to another, handing to each rider a small envelope. In addition to the State seal, each envelope bore the same address, "To the Governor of the State of Wyoming." To the rider, who, in front of the capital at Cheyenne, should first deliver the envelope entrusted to his care would go the greatest honor that both States had ever bestowed upon a horseman.

To the Governor as well as the thousands

who lined the streets to see the start of the historic event, the vast difference in the appearance of those twenty-six horses must have been the outstanding feature. At the right of the line a sorrel thoroughbred—with a turf record envied by many racing stables—stood nose to nose with a slim-necked Arabian mare from Lower California. But it was to the left that most eyes were directed.

At that end of the line the Governor paused to look admiringly at a great, glistening, black stallion that stood a full hand higher than any animal in the row. The horse's eyes, big in proportion to his magnificent head and powerful body, were bright and fearless. Yet of all the horses in that line, he stood the quietest. And the eyes of John Dillon, his owner and rider, smiling down at the Governor as he received the envelope, hinted of the same underlying courage and strength.

The horse was Sagamore, who, a few months before, had come out of the West unheralded except for the fact that he was a full brother to Prince Royal, the season's turf sensation. The two horses had met on the track for the first time in the Kentucky Derby. Sagamore had lost that race, but only because his rider—the same man who rode him now—had sacrificed the honor of winning for the greater honor of saving a jockey's life, after his horse had overcome a two-length's lead and fought his way to a neck and neck finish.

Sagamore was Kentucky bred—sired by the great Royal Monarch—but while still a suckling colt, had been shipped with his mother to the Dillon ranch in Colorado. There, in the foothills of the Rockies, and with the freedom of a wild mustang, the colt had developed into a magnificent horse, combining the whirlwind speed of his illustrous sire with the marvelous power and endurance that came from his life on the open range.

In stature the horse was a giant, yet his size was not the kind to interfere with speed. His chest was wide and deep, but the muscles rippled like rubber bands beneath his satin skin, and he had the long, graceful lines of the thoroughbred runner.

The contrast in size was especially noticeable because of the horse that stood at his left, almost in the shadow of the huge stallion. The little horse was typical of the Western range, of the color known as "strawberry roan," and his shoulder bore the seared mark of a branding iron. Any cow-puncher would have termed him "an ordinary bronc," yet any man who knew horses would have recognized certain points about him that meant he had the staying power.

Between the riders there was little difference in appearance. Both were small and wiry, and both had the tough, enduring strength that comes from life in the open. The very manner in which they sat in their saddles was proof that they were trained riders, and about the eyes of each were numerous fine wrinkles, caused by looking over open country beneath a scorching sun. Laramie Jones, world's champion relay rider, rode the little roan, and he smiled good-naturedly as he addressed Dillon.

"If size counted for anything in a horse race, I'm guessin' the Governor would feel like rulin' me and Patsy out."

Dillon answered the smile first. He was a quiet man, with a friendliness about him for any man who met him halfway.

"I take that to mean you don't figure the size of a horse cuts any ice."

"Not in this kind of a race," Jones said decisively. "Gameness ought to win this race, and I guess that's Patsy's long suit."

"He looks like a pretty good little cayuse," Dillon replied, studying the little horse; "but you know what they say about a good big man being better than a good little one."

"That don't apply to runnin'," Jones countered. "Besides, I've seen some little men with sand enough to offset any weight handicap."

Jones had rolled a cigarette and he leaned farther toward the big horse to shield himself from sight while he caught a few whiffs. A moment later the Governor stepped back into the street, and all the riders straightened in their saddles. The official starter stretched a starting rubber from a steel trolley-pole across the street in front of the horses as the Governor held up his hand for silence.

"I suppose all of you men are familiar with the conditions of the contest," he began, "so I shall only make a final appeal for fair play. While you are permitted to ride any way you like, and as far as you like each day, remember that it is your horse, after all, that must win the race. Whether you are able to conserve your mount's strength and not kill one of God's noblest animals in your efforts to win will depend upon your judgment as a man and your sense of fair sportsmanship. With that understanding — may the best horse and rider win!"

A deafening cheer sounded as the Governor concluded his brief address and walked to the curb. Then, after a glance at his watch, he signaled the starter and the rubber snapped across the street.

Most of the horses had felt the tension while standing in the street and leaped forward at the start. Sagamore, while standing quietly before, knew that the swish of the rubber meant a race, and his great body shot forward at the signal. But a word from Dillon instantly checked him.

From the capital building State Street extends mile after mile toward the East, and Dillon knew full well what that long stretch of hot pavement would do to a horse's hoofs. He slowed Sagamore to an easy gallop, and, as the horse settled to a steady gait, noticed that the majority of the riders had done the same.

Not all of them did, however. At the start the sorrel racer and the Arabian mare had started side by side, and now, perhaps because each rider was too stubborn to yield first place to the other, were making a race of it down the street. Dillon was wondering at the foolishness of this when the little roan horse slipped up beside him.

"That's a fine way to start them horses —and the Governor watchin' after makin' that talk," Jones remarked.

"I suppose it's partly the fault of the horses," Dillon replied. "Both of them are thoroughbreds, and pretty high-strung. I think that neither one has any business in a race of this kind."

"You're ridin' a thoroughbred yourself, ain't you?"

"Yes, but my horse is trained to mind. I believe that's the most important thing in training a horse, and I've been mighty careful of him. There's never been another man on his back."

"Why, isn't he safe?"

Dillon's quiet smile might have answered that for the asking.

"He's as gentle as a collie dog, but it's with a horse that knows only one master. Somehow, you seem to reach a better understanding of one another that means a lot more than pulling the bridle reins."

"You're sure right about that," Jones agreed, and after that they lapsed into silence as they galloped toward the city outskirts.

The highway extends almost due east from Salt Lake City to the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains, a distance of perhaps twenty miles. Then it begins a wide-sweeping, gentle swing to the left in order to pass through Immigrant Gap, the first break in the mighty barrier that stands like a protecting wall to the wonderful farming country about the shores of the Great Salt Lake.

Until the road swings to the northeast the elevation is slight, so Dillon allowed the big horse to hold a steady gait. Jones rode at his side, with the ease of a man long accustomed to the saddle, rolling numerous cigarettes. Occasionally they carried on bits of conversation, though both had settled to the grind of hard, all-day riding.

The majority of the other riders had started out at a moderate speed, but the longer stride of the stallion caused him to gradually draw away from most of these. When they reached the first turn, and Sagamore eased up at the beginning of the ascent, there were only five other riders in sight. But one of these was Laramie Jones, and Dillon, noticing that the little roan was apparently as fresh as Sagamore, felt a growing admiration for the shaggy little beast.

The race had started at seven o'clock, and noon found Dillon and Jones well up toward the Gap. The grade had become steeper and steeper, however, so both horses had slowed to an ordinary walk.

The conditions of the race required that

each rider must care for his own mount, and could eat or drink only when conditions permitted his horse to do so. Accordingly, when they stopped at a ranch house for lunch, the horses were allowed to drink sparingly from the watering trough, then led to the stable and fed. Thirty minutes had been decided upon as sufficient time to rest the horses, and at the end of that time, Sagamore and Patsy were back on the road.

A few miles from the ranch they overhauled the sorrel runner that had made such a brilliant start, limping painfully from a sprained tendon in the foreleg. It was understood that no rider could expect any great amount of help from another, but both Jones and Dillon dismounted to examine the horse's leg. It was clear that the animal could not go on, and accepting the advice in the spirit in which it was given, the sorrel's rider turned back toward the ranch house.

With each succeeding mile the road climbed higher and higher, winding in and out along the sides of the mountains, yet always upward. Ahead of the riders was the great cleft known as Immigrant Gap since the first Mormon wagon trains had found that opening for their ox teams. The two horses forged steadily toward it.

It was late afternoon when they reached the top of the range and passed between the towering cliffs that stand at either side of the Gap. For a mile or more the road twisted back and forth over the crest of the divide, then emerged on the eastern side of the mountains and began the steep descent toward Sound City.

Travel down a steep grade is as difficult for a horse as hard climbing, so both riders held back their animals. On this kind of going the little horse had a distinct advantage over Sagamore, yet the big stallion easily kept his footing.

According to their guide books the distance from Salt Lake City was slightly more than fifty miles, yet the setting sun was tinting the deeper cañons with purple shadows when two tired horses, a great black and a small roan, plodded into Sound City.

Wyoming is one State in which the garage has not entirely replaced the livery stable, and Dillon and Jones first gave their attention to finding suitable quarters for their horses. A two-story frame bore the sign "Hotel," and an inquiry here brought the information that a stable two blocks away had made special arrangements to care for the horses taking part in the race.

The Arabian mare and another horse entered in the contest—this latter a lean, rangy bay, were already in the stable. The Arabian was already bedded down, but there was a wheeze in the mare's breathing that Jones noticed as soon as they entered the building.

"She's all in," he said, indicating the Arabian's stall. "She'll be lucky if she's even able to get to her feet by morning."

"Sounds as if she may be wind-broken," Dillon replied. "I suppose her rider crowded her all the way up from Salt Lake and she went to pieces in the mountains. This big bay seems to be all right."

"He always is at the start of a race," Jones made answer. "That's Charley Montauk's Pathfinder, and he'd be a great horse if he could only keep the pace he sets at the start. I rode him two stretches in a cross-country relay once, and he led the bunch the first day out. When I caught him again, on the way back, he played out after five miles, and I like to never got to the next change station. He isn't exactly a quitter, but he just can't stay."

"He shouldn't give us much trouble, then?"

"No, not him; but there are some others in the race that may before we reach Cheyenne. I counted five horses before we left the Lake that ought to be pretty strong contenders."

After making sure that both horses had been properly cared for, Dillon and Jones started to the hotel. As they crossed the street toward the building a man called to Jones from a low-slung roadster drawn up at the hotel porch.

"That's Buckley, the owner of Patsy," Jones said to Dillon as he checked his step. "Come over and meet him if you want to."

"I thought Patsy was your own horse."

"No, but he will be if I win this race. I've been tryin' to get that little horse for two years, but Buckley wouldn't sell. I hate to see Buckley own him because he

has no more sympathy for a horse than a car. I got his name on a contract to sell me Patsy for three thousand dollars before I agreed to ride for him, but I won't have the money to pay for him unless I get the winning rider's purse."

Thinking that Buckley might wish to discuss the race with his rider alone, Dillon entered the hotel and engaged his room. He had finished eating when Jones and Buckley came in and took a table, and calling for a second cup of coffee, Dillon lingered to study the owner of the little roan.

Buckley was a man of the big-boned, muscular type. Even from a distance it was evident that he possessed a dominant personality. He wore high laced boots, and his shirt was open at the throat, exposing a thick neck that indicated bull strength. Dillon knew men as well as horses, and his impression was that Buckley was a brute, with plenty of power to back his brutality.

There had been a sort of unwritten understanding that the horses were to travel from sunup and sundown, provided they were able. After another visit to the stable, in which he found Sagamore peacefully munching hay, Dillon left a call for five o'clock and went to his room. He smoked a last cigar, then turned in for the night.

Dillon's first move the next morning was to order his own breakfast prepared while he went to the stable to feed his horse. Sagamore greeted him with a snort and stood rubbing his velvety nose against Dillon's shoulders as the man examined his hoofs and legs. As he left the stable Dillon glanced into the stall occupied by Patsy and discovered that the little horse had already left.

He was wondering at Jones's judgment in starting so early as he went in for breakfast, but a note given him by the night clerk explained. It read:

> Sorry we can't ride together, but it's like I thought. Buckley has staked all he owns on this race, so he's making me hit the trail at three o'clock. It's tough on Patsy, but he's a game little devil. I'll see you in Cheyenne, anyway.
>
> JONES.

By the time Dillon was ready to leave Sound City all the horses except the Arabian had left the stable. Jones had been right in his prediction, and a veterinary had been called to care for the mare. If the grueling climb of the day before had injured Sagamore, it was not apparent from the spirit he displayed as they started.

For the first few miles the highway drops steeply down toward the plains of Wyoming. Dillon was forced to ride carefully. By nine o'clock he was clear of the foothills and following a road that resembled a city boulevard. Sagamore wanted to run, but Dillon held him at a steady gallop. In time they passed several other horses, and the Utah-Wyoming State line, marked by stone ruin that had once been a cavalry post. It still lacked an hour of noon when Sagamore's hoof-beats sounded on the main thoroughfare of Elliston.

Even though Dillon learned there were seven riders ahead, most of whom had only stopped in the town to feed and water their horses, he lingered an hour. The rest enabled Sagamore to start the long fifty-mile run to Fort Custer with renewed strength. Once out of the town, Dillon let the big horse show a bit more speed.

Twenty miles from Elliston, Sagamore overtook a little gray mare that had pushed on through Sound City the night before and spent the night at a ranch. The mare was running easily, apparently in good condition to finish the race, but her pace was hardly as fast as Sagamore's, and the big black gradually drew away from her.

It was still daylight when Dillon rode into Fort Custer, yet he turned in at the town's most inviting livery stable. The proprietor, a chunky little man who seemed rather unwilling to leave his chair at the door to accommodate a patron, appeared surprised that Dillon intended to stop for the night.

"There's six riders ahead o' you," he stated. "They're all pushin' on to Flagler's ranch fer the night. It's only 'bout eighteen miles, and this horse o' yourn looks like he could make it 'fore night."

"He probably could, but I don't want to crowd him too fast. He's traveling fast enough to win the way he's going, and I want him to have plenty of strength left when we reach Laramie."

Half reluctantly, the man arose and showed Dillon to a stall. While arranging it for his horse the rider asked:

"What horse was leading when they came through here?"

"Four of 'em was together. A big bay they call Pathfinder, a cavalry runner from Fort Lincoln, an iron-gray mare from somewhere in Utah and Laramie Jones on a little roan."

"So Jones is up with the leaders," Dillon remarked, his tone showing that he was pleased. "How's the little horse holding out?"

"Fine. I figured him 'bout the freshest o' the lot when I looked 'em over. Laramie sure knows how to handle a horse."

Dillon agreed to that readily enough, then inquired the best place to stop for the night. A restaurant up the street kept a few furnished rooms upstairs, and after glancing over the place, Dillon decided to remain there overnight.

Fort Custer is one of the most historic spots in Wyoming, and when he had eaten a hearty meal in the restaurant, Dillon took a walk through the little town. The people, for the most part, are true Westerners, in their manners and dress, typical of the cattle country in which they live. Dillon found most of them keenly interested in the great race.

The proprietor of a cigar store pointed out the ruins of the barracks that had once sheltered troopers when they were not engaged in waging war against the hostile Utes and Cheyennes. By the time Dillon had looked the ruins over, it was growing dark.

Riding all day on horseback, even with a horse that rides easily, is tiresome. Dillon had no difficulty in falling asleep almost as soon as he touched the bed. He awoke at four o'clock, and by the time the sun rose was on his way. Two other horses had reached the fort during the night, but neither animal had rested sufficiently to start early that morning.

Dillon walked Sagamore for the first mile, to [illegible] have become stiffened a bit from the hard ride of the day before. The horse seemed livelier than usual, pulling at the bit to be allowed to gallop, so once satisfied of his condition, Dillon let him run. The long stride of the stallion, even when held back a trifle, clipped off the miles. Before reaching Stranger, the big horse passed the cavalry runner, a fine, well-trained animal, and later caught up with the iron-gray mare.

The two riders stabled their horses at the same place and went to a hotel together for lunch. At the hotel they learned that Pathfinder and the little roan, still holding their fast pace, had passed through the town two hours earlier.

"Pathfinder's showing better than I expected," the other rider said to Dillon. "I had heard that he wasn't good for more than one day's running at fast speed, but he must be gamer than I thought."

"How about Jones's horse?"

"Game to the core," was the quick reply. "Endurance isn't so remarkable in a good mustang because most of them have it, but that little devil has speed and staying power, too. I've seen him race before, so I know what he can do."

The gray mare had shown plenty of speed while coming into Stranger, so Dillon made no objection to taking the road with her after lunch. He could have got more speed from Sagamore had he wished to push the big horse, but the mare stuck to the pace so gamely that he realized that both horses could easily reach Rock Cliffs before night.

In the late afternoon they rode into White River, stopping only to allow their horses to drink. It was twilight when they reached Rock Cliffs, where they intended to remain overnight. They learned that the two horses ahead of them had pushed on toward Red Bluffs, twenty-five miles farther east.

The rider of the gray, by one of those tricks of Fate, was the victim of a bad attack of indigestion during the night, though Dillon did not learn of this until the next morning. A physician had already been called, so, after wishing his late companion a speedy recovery, Dillon saddled Sagamore and began the day's ride. He knew that for the remainder of the race every mile and minute might count, because it was half over.

It was still early morning when he reached the little town of Red Bluffs and learned that Patsy and Pathfinder had

started before daylight. From this point the highway follows the railroad for some distance, passing through little towns every eight or ten miles.

In most of these towns the few inhabitants turned out to glimpse the great black horse that, if he stopped at all, seemed to barely wet his muzzle at a watering trough.

At Table Top, where Dillon stopped for lunch, the only talk of the race seemed to concern "that little roan horse." The mention of only one horse puzzled him, but he found the answer to that later in the afternoon. An hour after leaving Table Top he overtook Pathfinder, and after talking a few minutes with the other rider, forged on ahead. Pathfinder, true to form, had finally weakened from the terrific pace set by Jones and his little mustang.

It was almost twilight, and both horse and rider were growing tired when they reached the town of Wanderer, yet Dillon resolved to push a bit farther. Crested Ridge was only twelve miles away, but darkness had settled over the country when Sagamore trotted into the place and Dillon learned the same disappointing news. Laramie Jones had passed through thirty minutes before without stopping. Dillon had hoped to overtake Jones at that place, yet the news increased his admiration for the little roan horse.

Dillon was back in the saddle by sunup the next morning, galloping on toward Rawlins, which he reached slightly before noon. After a brief stop he swung back to the road. Two hours later he rode through Fort Steele and sent Sagamore pounding across the long bridge that spans the Platte River. Ahead of him loomed the Medicine Bow range, and the road began to ascend a short distance from the river. In spite of the grade he allowed Sagamore to travel as he wished, reasoning that for the remainder of the trip the horse could be depended upon to do his utmost.

It was dark before he rounded a turn in the mountains and struck the comparatively smooth road that swings southward toward the town of Elk Mountain. The sandy highway, glistening like a wide, white ribbon before him, was a temptation for more speed, yet when Sagamore voluntarily eased down a bit, Dillon did not crowd him. He knew that in spite of the horse's splendid heart and strength, the five days' race was beginning to show its effects.

A steady gallop enables a horse to cover much ground, however, and Sagamore [illegible] steadily. [illegible] Dillon [illegible] the [illegible] of the hoofs of his horse, he heard the *rat-a-tat* of hoofs on the road ahead, and Sagamore quickened his stride. A mile slipped by before the stallion overtook the other horse and a wave of gladness swept over Dillon as he recognized Jones and Patsy.

"You running son of a gun!" he greeted in the manner that Jones liked best. "I had begun to doubt that I was ever going to catch you. How the deuce do you manage to hold that little horse up?"

Both horses, as if understanding the friendship of their riders, had slowed to a walk, and neither man urged them faster.

"It's Patsy that's holdin' me up," Jones laughed. "I told you he was dead game, but I'm leery about startin' him as early as Buckley wants me to each morning. A horse is only capable of doing so much, but Buckley is the kind of owner that every rider hates. All he's thinkin' about is the money he's got bet on this race."

"What became of him after we left Sound City?"

"He's trailin' along in that big car of his, and expectin' this horse to make the same time. He'll be waitin' for us in Elk Mountain, and I can imagine his feelin's when he sees that you've finally caught up with me."

That prediction was true, and Buckley appeared at the livery stable while both men were unsaddling.

"What's the matter?" he demanded of Jones. "They tell me you walked your horse in. Is it [illegible]."

"I did. Dillon, here, overtook me a few miles out, and we let our horses take their own time comin' in."

"That's a damn fine way to run a horse race," Buckley snapped, turning Dillon with a glare in the light of the stable lantern. "You'll do better to ride alone. I'm thinking."

"I'm thinkin' the same thing," Jones re-

plied, evidently striving to control his temper. "I'm gettin' all the speed out of that horse he has, but you can't expect him to keep up with a car."

"No, but I do expect him to get into Cheyenne first, and he's not going to do that and walk."

Jones did not bother to reply, and a moment later Buckley left the stable.

They had arrived in Elk Mountain about eight o'clock, so in spite of the fact that the race was nearing its close, Dillon reasoned that he dared not start Sagamore earlier than four the next morning. It still lacked a few minutes of that time when he came to the stall and made a discovery that left him dumfounded. The night before he had carefully measured Sagamore's feed, because a racing horse must be carefully fed, yet the feed box in the stall was more than half filled with oats and a sack of grain lay near the manger.

Dillon leaped into the stall, suddenly maddened because of the trick that had been worked on him. He aroused Sagamore, and the horse, after a moment, got to his feet. The animal had eaten his fill, but luckily had not foundered.

Dillon hurried to the office stable and aroused the night man, who directed him to the home of the nearest veterinary. When the man arrived at the stable, Dillon had led the stallion outside and was walking him in the street.

"Well, he doesn't seem to be in any danger," the veterinary said after an examination, "but he must have a stomach of iron. You can't ride him faster than a walk before noon, but he'll be all right then."

Dillon handed the veterinary a bill, then turned to the stableman. "Who was in that stable after I left it last night?"

"Nobody, until two o'clock this morning, when they started that little roan. After the horse left that big man who owns him came back to the stall for something they had left, and I heard his car start as soon as he went outside."

Dillon said nothing. It wasn't necessary, though he received some satisfaction from knowing that Jones had not been guilty of the trick. He paid the stableman to walk Sagamore while he went to a near-by restaurant for a cup of coffee, then rode slowly out of town. In his heart was a great bitterness against Buckley for his attempt to put a rival horse out of the race by such foul means.

It was probable that it would cost Sagamore the race, because Patsy was two hours ahead, while the big horse—with speed and endurance to win the race by hours—was forced to walk. Still Dillon valued the great stallion more than the purse and the honor of winning, so in spite of his feelings he obeyed the veterinary's orders.

By noon the horse had traveled only thirty miles, but he was gradually recovering from the effects of his feast. Dillon gave him a try at galloping then, and when he seemed all right, kept him at it, though he was careful not to let him get too warm. After a time he reached a small stream, where he allowed the horse to drink sparingly, then continued on his way.

During the long afternoon, when he realized the horse was out of danger, Dillon turned Sagamore loose, enjoying the thrill that comes from hearing the wind sing past his ears. It almost seemed that Sagamore was aware of his blunder and was making every effort to recover lost time, yet they were still thirty miles from Laramie when Dillon stopped at a roadside ranch for the night.

Sagamore greeted his master with a snort the next morning; which meant that he was ready and willing to start.

"It's a darned good thing you do feel good, old top," Dillon said to the horse, stroking the shiny mane as he fed him. "We've got some job ahead of us to ever catch that little horse."

He had traveled a mile when the sun began tinting the eastern sky that morning and the horse was running with ease. At twenty minutes after nine he galloped into Laramie, Jones's home town, and paused only long enough for water for himself and horse.

Hundreds of persons were watching the results of the race and a great crowd gathered about the horse when he stopped. Some one handed Dillon a morning paper, and he was again in the saddle before he noticed the headlines. It read: "The Little

Horse Wins," then followed a statement in smaller type that Jones had passed Laramie thirty miles ahead of his nearest competitor and would reach Cheyenne that afternoon.

Dillon tossed the paper away without reading the story and gave his attention to riding.

Ten minutes was all that Dillon took for lunch, feeding Sagamore beside a watering trough while he munched a sandwich. He let the horse drink rather freely, then swung back into the saddle, somewhat elated at the news that Jones was less than an hour ahead. Cheyenne was less than thirty miles away, yet Dillon was doubtful of overtaking the little horse. Still he reasoned that Sagamore was probably traveling twice as fast as Patsy and he urged the animal forward at racing speed.

Twenty miles from the Wyoming capital Dillon's heart leaped as he sighted a horse and rider on the road ahead. When Sagamore overtook them it proved to be a cowboy on his way into town.

Perhaps an hour later he met an auto, and the driver shouted that the leading horse was just ahead. As mile after mile flitted by without him seeing anything of Jones, he began to wonder if the driver could have been mistaken. Then, just as he sighted the smoke of Cheyenne, he recognized the little roan just topping a slight hill.

Patsy was running, though it seemed to Dillon that it took a long, long time for him to cross the hill. Jones was miles ahead, however, and Dillon leaned over the big stallion's neck, talking to him as he sent him forward at whirlwind speed, wondering if he could hold that pace after such a heart-breaking endurance test. Sagamore did, and the sight that Cheyenne witnessed will never be forgotten by those who saw it.

The news that the racers were coming had long since been telephoned ahead, and the streets were lined with people. The Governor of Wyoming, a good sportsman himself, stood in the rear seat of his car and cheered when Patsy, game to the last, but overtaxed from lack of rest, staggered into the long street that leads to the capital.

The little roan went to his knees, then regained his feet and came forward. The cheers that greeted the little beast must have warmed any red-blooded man's heart, yet they suddenly stilled, then broke out anew. Over the hill at the outskirts of the city charged a great black horse, running with the speed of his thoroughbred sire as his flaring mane whipped the face of his rider.

The little cow-horse was six blocks from the capital when the racing stallion flashed past. Jones looked up and smiled, and somehow, that smile hurt Dillon.

Dillon had delivered his letter and was receiving the congratulations of the Governor when a shout down the street drew his attention. Instantly, he whirled Sagamore and raced down the street. He had recognized a low-slung roadster in the street and a big man who had literally jerked Jones from the saddle of his horse.

Whether Buckley struck the man or not, Dillon wasn't sure, but he did see something that was even worse. Jones had been flung to the ground, and as Buckley caught the bridle reins of the little horse, he swung a vicious kick to the animal's stomach.

Ordinarily, Dillon was inclined to reason things out, but he didn't then. As Sagamore answered the tug at the reins, Dillon leaped from the saddle onto Buckley's shoulders, smashing his right fist into the big man's face as he landed on his feet. Buckley staggered back, and Dillon closed in, sending two blows to the stomach that dropped the brutal owner to the pavement.

Hats were thrown into the air and hundreds cheered themselves hoarse, yet Dillon scarcely heard all that. He stepped back and assisted Jones to his feet, then on sudden impulse, jerked a folded check book from his shirt pocket and leaned against Sagamore as he wrote. The check was for three thousand dollars, payable to bearer, and Dillon showed it to Jones before he turned to Buckley.

"That's what Jones was to pay you for Patsy—and you've just sold him that horse," Dillon said quietly. Buckley hesitated an instant, then climbed to his feet and walked groggily to his car. As he drove away from the jeering crowd Dillon turned to Jones—and even the Governor joined in the cheering as they walked down the street leading their horses—a great black stallion and a worn-out little roan.

A New Girl in Town

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "A Self-Made Thief," "Country Love," "Madame Storey's Way," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RUNNER.

ON the surface of things the colonel and Diantha had completely abandoned themselves to the devices of the idle rich. Afternoons when the weather permitted, they were accustomed to ride. To the colonel's satisfaction Diantha had proved to have an affinity for the saddle. She was fast becoming a horsewoman worthy of her esquire. They had soon exhausted the possibilities of the merry-go-round bridal path in the park, and the colonel had sent his saddle horses up to a club in Westchester County that they could reach within an hour by motor. Three or more afternoons a week this was their objective. They would get home just in time to dress for dinner.

One evening when they were journeying home a few minutes later than usual, their car was halted for a moment alongside the curb on the park side of the avenue. Diantha beheld a young man in running togs padding toward them by the park wall, bare-legged, bare-armed, bare-headed, chin up. Her imagination was struck by his beauty. In the city especially where we are so swaddled and confined, the sight of naked beauty brings a shock as of something forgotten.

It was something more than his beauty, too; the spirit of the runner fired her own young spirit. At that hour other young men were languidly tying their cravats before a mirror preparatory to lounging on their backbones underneath an [illegible] and ran with his chin up, filling his lungs.

In another moment she received a greater shock upon perceiving that the runner was

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none other than Randal Guyon. Her heart [illegible]. It was less for her to remind herself that he was a morbid, evil-minded youth; here he was the very symbol of clean living. Something deep within Diantha was stirred. He was gone in a second, but she could not forget him. He had not seen her, of course, through the windows of the closed car.

At intervals during the evening and during the next day she thought of him with pleasure. The graceful poised figure flitted like Hermes in and out of her dreams. On the following evening at the same hour, without realizing what she was doing, she found herself at one of the front windows on the watch. The white figure trotted by alongside the park wall, and Diantha experienced the same little shock. She had approved of Randal's well-fitting clothes. How unexpectedly beautiful he was without them!

The next day it rained and they did not go riding. As the afternoon wore on a great restlessness took possession of Diantha. She would not examine her thoughts very closely. She was principally annoyed with the weather. Toward nightfall it stopped raining and her heart rose strangely. Still she would not ask herself what difference a little rain made.

She started to dress for dinner fifteen minutes earlier than usual to the great annoyance of her maid. That young person's dilatoriness exasperated Diantha. In the end she sent her away and finished herself in a hurry. She had a whole half hour to spare. Dressing for dinner was a ritual with the colonel, and he was safely out of the way for the time being. Diantha let herself down in the elevator with hot cheeks. A little voice inside her was asking aghast: "What are you going to do? What are you going to do?" To which the only possible answer was: "I don't care! I'm going to do it!"

There was a footman on duty in the hall. Diantha, blushing at her own depravity, sent him down to the basement on a mythical errand, then darted into the coat room. Some of their heavier outdoor wraps were kept here. She got a long, plain coat that covered her completely, and pulled rubbers over her satin slippers. She slipped out of the house, leaving the door off the latch so that she could get in again without summoning anybody.

She felt horribly guilty, for it was the first time she had ever deceived the colonel. He had ordered her to break off all relations with Guyon. But she could not help herself.

It was about forty feet to the corner. The homeward flow of pedestrians up the avenue had slackened, but the street was well filled with shiny motor cars carrying fashionable folk up and down toward their dinners. She crossed to the park side, where it was comparatively shadowy under the naked trees, and there were few walkers. She went a block or two uptown at a smart pace, listening breathlessly for the pad of running feet behind her, then turned and came back more slowly. She had almost reached her own corner again when she saw him coming along by the wall. Her heart beat like a little pneumatic riveter.

She had planned to be greatly surprised upon meeting him, but she was not a first-class dissimulator. She only said: "Oh!" rather flatly, and stopped. She was thankful for the darkness which swallowed her blushes.

Randal stopped dead in his tracks with his arms hanging. "You!" he said. He forgot everything in his hunger for her. His deep-set eyes were like those of a famine sufferer.

Under this terrible gaze Diantha became completely confused. "What—what are you doing?" she stammered.

"Running," he said solemnly.

The absurdity of both question and answer struck her and she laughed suddenly. His strained face softened wonderfully at the delicious sound. He laughed, too. The tension was relieved.

"But you mustn't stop!" said Diantha in distress. "You'll catch cold!"

"I'm going," he said, but remained glued to the spot, his hungry eyes fixed on her.

An alarming silence descended between them. Diantha lost her wits. In her confusion she said exactly the wrong thing. "It's such a long time since I've seen you."

Randal smiled ruefully.

"That's not my fault," he said.

"Perhaps I was too hasty," murmured Diantha.

"Oh, do you mean that?" he cried, all his heart in his voice.

"You mustn't stop!" she said. "Already you are beginning to shiver!"

"I'm not. It won't do me any harm."

"I must go," she said with a sort of bustle of preparation, but not making any actual move.

"Don't go!" he implored.

It was sweet to her. "But it's too absurd—like this—people are staring at us—you'll catch cold—"

"I'll never get another chance to speak to you," he said desperately.

"I know what we can do!" she said suddenly. "The colonel has coats hanging in the coat room. I'll get you one."

"Oh, will you?" he cried, beaming with happiness.

"Run up and down till I get back," she flung over her shoulder. She darted across the road.

To her dismay the footman was in the hall again. She had forgotten about him. He was greatly astonished to see her enter.

"Oh, Mathews!" she said instantly, without thought. "There's a poor man outside on the corner shivering with the cold! I'm going to give him one of the colonel's old coats!"

She ran into the coat room. "Good Heavens, what a glib liar I am!" she thought.

When she came out with the coat Mathews said: "Shall I take it to him, miss?"

"No, I want the pleasure of handing it to him myself."

"Hadn't I better go with you?"

"Nonsense! There are plenty of people in the street. I'm perfectly safe. You stay here."

He could not go counter to her direct command, but it was with a very disapproving air that he let her out.

Diantha raced back to the corner. Randal met her on the other side, and she helped him into the fleecy coat. They leaned against the park wall and looked at each other disconcerted and smiling. It was a moment of perfect happiness, but almost the first word destroyed it.

"You said you were sorry you turned me away," he said eagerly.

She nodded.

"Then you have thought over what I told you?"

Diantha drew away from him. "No! No! No!" she said. "You were wrong! Every new day proves to me how wrong you were!"

He looked away from her sullenly. A wretched feeling of constraint divided them.

"Oh, dear!" wailed Diantha. "Why must we begin to quarrel as soon as we open our mouths?"

"You won't face things!" he muttered.

"Why should we face things that force us to quarrel? Here we are! Such a fantastic sort of meeting! We ought to carry it off fantastically; not bother with reality. Think what a clever scene it would be in a play!"

It was impossible for him to hold anger against her. He loved her so!

"But I'm not clever!" he said with his crooked smile.

"Well, neither am I!" said Diantha.

They laughed and felt better.

"Why do you run every night?" she asked.

"You have seen me before?"

"Yes, three nights now."

"You think I'm a fool to do it?"

"Oh, no! I think it's fine! It changes my whole opinion of you. I'd like—" She stopped, blushing.

He could not speak for pleasure. But his eyes were eloquent.

"I have a confession to make," Diantha said impulsively. "I came out on purpose to meet you—I wanted to tell you—that I felt differently."

His eyes shone with joy. "Did you? *Did* you?" he said breathlessly. "How wonderful of you!"

His joy confused her afresh.

"You haven't told me why you do it," she said hastily.

The light died out of his face. "Don't you know why?" he muttered. "Can't you guess?"

She shook her head.

"Well—I have a sort of confession to make to you, too. I saw you that morning—by the little lake in the park."

Diantha shuddered.

"I wish I could forget that."

"Tell me, how did you happen to be there?" he begged. "It torments me!"

"I wanted to stop the fight," she murmured.

"He had told you where it was going to be?"

She nodded.

"*I* shouldn't have told you," he said.

It was his only word against his rival. After a while he said: "So now you see why I'm doing this. To wipe that out."

"I understand," she said. But she did not understand. She thought he meant merely to wipe out an ugly recollection.

There was another and a longer silence, but this not an unhappy one. Leaning against the park wall they pressed a little together, each filled with a bliss neither dared to acknowledge, each supposing that the other was unconscious of that intoxicating contact.

"I don't see why we can't be friends," Diantha murmured at last.

"Can I come to the house?" he asked eagerly.

"Well—no!" stammered poor Diantha. "Not just at present."

"He hates me," Randal muttered gloomily.

"That's ridiculous!" she said.

"Oh, no, it isn't! I know the reason!"

"What is it?"

"I can't tell you if you have not already guessed it."

The situation was becoming strained again. "Now you're talking in riddles," said Diantha, frowning. "Tell me plainly what you mean."

"Useless as long as you think I'm rabid on the subject," he said dejectedly.

"Well, you are!" said Diantha crossly.

Naturally it made him cross, and he said the thing he had been admonishing himself not to say ever since she had come. "I saw you a few days ago driving with My—with Mrs. Cheeseman."

Diantha's heart sunk. She thought. "Oh, dear! Now he'll begin on her!"

"How did you become acquainted with her?" Randal asked cautiously.

Diantha could not take him into her confidence, of course.

"We have become friends," she said coolly. "She's the only woman friend I have."

This was gall and wormwood to Randal.

"She's no fit friend for you!" he blurted out.

Nothing could have kept him from saying it.

He went on to particularize. Diantha listened with a sore heart. It was all true, of course, but she could not admit it to him. She was thinking: "The colonel was right. I dare not be friends with this man! I have to *drive* him away from me—or show him my hand. Serves me right for disobeying!"

She cried aloud with a fine show of spirit:

"What gets into you that every time I make a friend you must slander so hatefully! You are one of the kind who believes evil of everybody! The evil must be in yourself!"

"You shouldn't go by what *I* say," Randal insisted, unhappy and dogged.

"I don't! I don't!" she cried. "I don't pay the least attention to your slanders on my friends. I forget about it as quickly as possible!"

"But you owe it to yourself to investigate," he persisted. "Go to anybody you can trust, and ask for a plain, unvarnished account of Myra Follett's career. You'll get it from anybody."

Hurt and confused as she was, Diantha's appearance of anger soon merged into the real thing. She had to get rid of him. Very well, best make a complete job of it.

"I shan't! I shan't!" she cried. "It's none of your busines! Your slanders are contemptible! I'm sorry I ever spoke to you. I shan't make the same mistake again!"

As she started to run he said: "Wait! You're forgetting the overcoat."

She had to wait, her face strained away from him. Wriggling out of the coat, he hung it over her arm. She flew across the road. There was a bit of the fatalist in

Randal that stood him in bad part at this crisis. Dogged and despairing he watched her go.

As she approached, Diantha saw the colonel, bareheaded, on his doorstep, looking toward her with an extraordinary expression of anxiety.

"Diantha!" he cried. "Thank God!" Here you are."

How her sore heart warmed to him! How it reproached her for deceiving him!

His eyes were upon the overcoat. She had to account for it somehow. She began to rattle off the same tale she had told the footman.

". . . Not a beggar. A poor, shivering man who hadn't any overcoat. But when I came back with it he was gone. I looked everywhere. I hope you don't mind my taking your coat."

"Oh, the coat! That's nothing!" He was looking at her with a peculiar sadness.

Diantha had an uneasy feeling that her story had not made good. "The house was so hot!" she went on lamely. "I just wandered out for a mouthful of fresh air before dinner."

"Diantha," he said softly, "I was looking out of the front window."

"Oh!" she cried, instantly crushed with shame. "Forgive me for deceiving you! I soon repented of it. Indeed I did, I did! I have sent him away."

"Diantha," he said gravely, "I have never told you the name of the lady we are working to save."

This sounded so oddly irrelevant, she lifted her shamed head to stare at him.

"It is Randal Guyon's mother."

"Oh, Heaven!" breathed Diantha, aghast. "Oh! Now I understand!"

CHAPTER XIX.

MANEUVERS.

MYRA became daily more enamored of her rôle of Diantha's tender, wise, humorous mentor, and she played it to perfection. What a treat it would have been to one of Myra's cynical male friends to have heard her with the girl. All the time in her purring way she was seeking to becloud the crystal clarity of Diantha's mind with her own sensuous, *laissez-faire* philosophy. But if Diantha's mind was clear, it was as hard as crystal also. Only the colonel could have appreciated how well the girl played *her* part when she was alone with Myra.

During all their talks Diantha never ceased trying to find out whether Myra had some particular object, or was just bent on mischief generally. Myra was very chary of introducing Kirwan Sutliffe's name, but it had to come up in the end, and then with all Myra's cleverness, Diantha perceived that the older woman was acting as a sort of emissary for the man. Diantha told the colonel, and they had a good laugh over this odd development in their favor.

"Help her out! Help her out!" he said.

One day Diantha asked Myra with an innocent air: "What do you think of Kirwan Sutliffe, really?"

"Oh, my dear," drawled Myra. "I only know him as one of hundreds. A tall blond youth, isn't he?"

"Not a youth," said Diantha demurely. "Very much of a man. Very handsome in a masterful sort of way."

Myra concealed a smile.

"I place him now. Hawk nose. Thinks pretty well of himself."

"Well, that's better than humility in a man," said Diantha.

After that Sutliffe was continually the subject of their talk. Diantha probed Myra for information. She did not get much. Diantha had no doubt in the world but that these talks were all duly reported to Sutliffe, and it amused her not a little to shape the talk in the way that she desired him to get it.

"Wouldn't you call Sutliffe a very passionate man?" she asked Myra one day.

Myra laughed at her seeming naïveté. "Why do you think so?"

"He makes furious love to me."

"I thought the most passionate men were generally dumb."

"I dare say. It isn't what he *says*, but the way he looks at you. Scorching. It bothers me a lot."

"Why should it?"

"I'm not treating him right. I can't

give in to him. Yet I don't want to send him away, either."

"Don't you like the scorching?" asked Myra.

"Yes, I do," said Diantha; "rather—if I could stop there."

"But why not give in?"

"I don't know. Something prevents me. I suppose its because I'm not sure if it's the real thing—for me, I mean."

"How can you find out except by letting yourself go?"

"But if I *should* let myself go," said Diantha, wide-eyed, "and if I found I had made a mistake, how could I ever get myself back again?"

"You dear innocent!" said Myra with a kindly laugh. "That's just girlish nonsense! You're not going to forever lose your grip on yourself just because you let a man kiss you once, and kiss him back again to see what it's like."

"He did once," said Diantha. "And I didn't like it."

"Go to it!" laughed Myra. "It improves, girls think—or rather they used to think—you're a holdover from a more proper age—that in the first moment of surrender some extraordinary change is going to take place in them. Nothing in it, Di! You'll find yourself exactly the same woman afterward that you were before."

"I would be—er—sweeter to him if I could, without danger."

"In a way of speaking you *ought* to be nice to him, shouldn't you?"

"Yes," said Diantha. "It's hard to have to hurt him so."

Nevertheless she frowned.

"What is it?" asked Myra.

"He's not my ideal. My ideal man would be terribly passionate, too, but there would be something else—tenderness. I couldn't let myself go unless I felt *friends* with him."

"You've got to take men as you find them, not as you imagine them," said Myra sententiously. "Besides, according to you, you've been tormenting the poor devil. No wonder he acts like a bear. Tenderness would come out later."

"Maybe it would," murmured Diantha, making herself look particularly innocent. "He's never asked me to marry him. I suppose that would follow."

Myra smiled to herself.

"But I don't want to marry anybody," Diantha went on. "I'm quite sure on that point. Not for years. I don't suppose he'd be content with a long engagement. Under the circumstances it would be scarcely honest, would it, to—even for a moment—"

"Now you're harking back to 1800 again," said Myra. "Women have been enfranchised. Why bother about marriage until you're ready? Women have just as much right now to sample life as men have."

"That's a thrilling thought!" said Diantha demurely.

She went home sorely tempted by the idea of "sampling life." Like all warm-blooded young people she had a mighty curiosity about life. Surely she would be safe in letting herself go just a little, she told herself. Was it not all in the best of causes? How could she learn about things, as the colonel wished her to learn, unless she tried things out?

When Sutliffe came that night she looked him over speculatively. In a purely physical way he was uncommonly good looking. Moreover, the passion of the man, the sudden trembling of his muscular hands, the huskiness of his voice thrilled her. But, however much she may have wished to let herself go, something stronger than herself still forced her to keep him at arm's length. They quarreled. Sutliffe went home in a rage.

On the following day he called on Myra full of his grievances. She listened to the recital, smoking contemptuously and blowing smoke rings upward.

"You fool!" she said with her customary frankness. "If I was a man I'd have won the girl long ago."

"That's all very well," muttered Sutliffe. "You're in her confidence. You know where you stand."

"Well, I repeat it all to you, don't I?"

"I don't know if you do or not," he muttered.

Myra ignored this.

"She was here yesterday," she said calmly. "We discussed you thoroughly."

"What about it?"

"She's ready to be crazy about you," drawled Myra, blowing a ring.

He jumped up excitedly.

"I always though so! Then it's all right!"

To tease him Myra added casually: "She also mentioned that you hadn't said anything about marriage yet."

"Marriage!" cried Sutliffe with a loud laugh. "What does she think I am?"

"She thinks you're a passionate devil. She's thrilled to pieces!"

"Well, that's all right. That's all I want. To-night I won't let her stall me off. I'll—"

"You'll probably get your face scratched," drawled Myra.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, scowling. "If she's crazy about me—"

"My dear friend, that caveman stuff only gets over on the stage. Remember, there were cavewomen, too."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Use your wits. This girl is as ready to drop from the tree as a mellow peach. Only needs a little shake. She's full of curiosity about you. She's thrilled whenever you come near her. But it's your roughness puts her off. You scowl at her like a pirate. What you've got to do is to beguile her. Make love to her. Third act stuff in a garden with a blue spot. Go down on your marrow bones if necessary. Make your voice flutelike, pull out the tremolo stop. Act *Romeo*. Lord, what fools women are! Never can get enough of it! And men worse fools not to see it!"

"There's something in what you say," Sutliffe muttered, frowning.

Myra went off into a peal of derisive laughter.

One evening the colonel said to Diantha: "I hope you won't be troubled with that young blackguard much longer."

Diantha looked up in surprise.

"When we do get rid of him, we'll begin really to enjoy ourselves—Palm Beach, Cuba, Europe next summer. What would you say to a yacht?"

Somehow the idea of leaving New York aroused no enthusiasm in Diantha's breast.

"But I like something to do," she objected. She presently went on frowning a little. "Do you mean to say you are going to catch Sutliffe without my help?" She had sacrificed a lot in this game, and it was galling to think she wasn't even necessary to its success.

"I have to have all sorts of lines out, my dear," said the colonel. "At the moment it looks as if one of them was going to hook the fish. But I'll need your help in landing him."

Diantha was silent. She waited for further information.

The colonel proceeded: "I have learned that Sutliffe keeps the letters we are after in the Adams Trust Company's safe deposit vaults. He has a small box there, the sort that rents for ten dollars a year. One day we relieved Sutliffe of the keys for an hour or two without his knowledge, and had duplicates made. Then an agent of mine hired another box in the vault and commenced visiting it regularly. In the course of time he became friendly with one of the attendants. Here we had a stroke of luck, for these fellows are mostly incorruptible. But my agent was able to work on the attendant's feelings by telling him, without mentioning names, that Sutliffe was blackmailing a woman by means of certain letters which he kept in his box there. My agent has finally brought the attendant to a point where the man is willing to help him rob Sutliffe's box of the letters, provided nothing else is touched."

"How would you need me?" asked Diantha.

"I'll tell you. The attendant doesn't want to lose his job, naturally, and he makes it a condition that we keep Sutliffe occupied outside while the trick is being turned. That's your job. It must be done some day between two and three o'clock, for at that hour the other attendant is out to lunch, and our man is alone in the vault except for a negro maid. She attends to the booths where the customers clip their coupons. If she did see the attendant hand Sutliffe's box to my man she wouldn't know the difference."

"What day?" asked Diantha.

"Any day you set, my dear. But give me sufficient warning.

Diantha told Myra the colonel was becoming jealous.

"I suppose it's natural," she murmured.

"Quite natural," said Myra dryly. "What are you going to do?"

"Nothing," said Diantha with a sigh. "I couldn't risk making him really angry."

"You can meet Sutliffe here if you like," Myra suggested casually.

Diantha shook her head. She could not appear too eager. "Bad enough to lie on my own account," she said. "I won't drag you into it. Besides, I couldn't let Sutliffe think that I had got you to do it for me. It would undermine my defenses."

"I thought you wanted them undermined?"

"I don't want him to know they are."

Myra laughed.

"Suppose I give a party? Naturally, I would ask you both. You meet here by accident."

Diantha shook her head. "It's very difficult for me to get away in the evening."

"At the *dansant*, then, four till seven."

"We ride every afternoon," said Diantha. "Indeed, the only time I could get off this week would be some day when he stays down town to lunch."

"What day?" asked Myra.

"Well, Thursday I know he's not going to be home."

"I'll give a *déjeuner dansant*," said Myra. "It will be something new."

CHAPTER XX.

THE DÉJEUNER DANSANT.

THE principal room in Myra's apartment was forty feet long, ample in size for the select party that she planned. It was a gold room; the rounded, patterned ceiling was lavishly incrusted with gold leaf, the walls shimmered in various tones of gold and brown, the furniture was upholstered in gold thread brocades. It made a gorgeous background for Myra in black.

For the party she had chosen to appear as Night, in a wonderful abbreviated fashioning of black lace. There was no touch of color about her except her violently rouged cheeks. Her only ornament was an astonishing crescent of diamonds bound to her brow by a black velvet ribbon.

The glass doors into the parrot room were thrown open, and the orchestra, a dozen sleek darkies in miraculously fitting evening clothes, was installed in there. Beyond the parrot room was the purple boudoir. This was filled with palms and ferns to make a conservatory for the occasion. A few twinkling colored lights amid the greenery created a romantic twilight. The curtains of all the rooms were closely drawn. Daylight would have spoiled the scene.

It was a buffet lunch, and the guests moved around at will. George Bricklym and Oliver Judd Rambert were there. As unattached males who never allowed business to interfere with their engagements, they were in demand at such functions. In the daytime *dansants*, at the best, produce rather a scratch lot of men. Sutliffe was like a king among them. Another man was Hoeber Dimmick, who still went by the title of "Myra's Manager," though she had retired from the stage. He was rather a decayed looking youth of forty odd, whose manner became ever more boyish as the hair thinned on his pate. The rest of the men were professional tea dancers, young, comely, beautifully dressed; all with alert and guarded eyes. They were all equally ready to dance, to talk, to listen, to make love in either the worshipful or the masterful style.

The ladies included Myra's "most intimate friends" of the moment; *i. e.*, those sufficiently in the know for her to wish to be seen with them; a couple of screen stars, the latest emotional actress, a society woman or two who had achieved notoriety through marital exploits. There were also several ladies "asked out of kindness, my dear," who nervously effaced themselves and acted as admiring chorus to the glittering principals. There are always some of these at such a gathering.

After the party had started, to Myra's great annoyance, Henry Cheeseman turned up. That morning Myra had suggested the propriety of his staying away.

"Nobody will be here that you care about," and he had appeared to agree.

"That's all right, my dear, I have to run over to Philadelphia."

Yet here he was in a braided cutaway with a carnation in his buttonhole. The fact was that Henry, a captain of finance down town and a worm at home, was learning to use the underground tactics of the worm.

He was careful to approach his wife for the first time at a moment when there were others around her. Her glance upon him was not friendly.

"I thought you were in Philadelphia!"

Henry smiled painfully. "I was fortunately able to close the deal by telephone, my dear." Somehow, his Wall Street manner never seemed to go down at home.

"How nice for all of us!" said Myra cuttingly. "Now that you're here, look after the orchestra, will you? Give them a drink once in a while to jazz them up, but not enough to make them fresh."

As he walked unhappily away Myra said languidly to the man she was with, quite loud enough for Henry to hear: "Husbands are so *naif*, poor dears!"

During most of the afternoon Henry stood about in the corners of his own rooms piteously inviting somebody to take notice of him, like a waiter on a commision basis when business is poor. But they rarely did. When his load of self-consciousness became too great to be borne he went to another corner, and took a fresh pose.

Once he screwed up his courage sufficiently to ask Myra to dance. He was turned down. His eyes followed her around furtively and wistfully. She affected to take no notice of it, but it made her furious. She got him alone finally.

"Do you think you're adding to the success of my party by standing round looking like a fool?" she demanded. "Either act as if you belonged, or go to your own room and play solitaire!"

Henry, in desperation, attached himself to Mrs. Pryor, one of the faded, anxious ladies who was earning her tea by the fervent admiration of everybody present. She was delighted to be noticed by a millionaire, and the rest of the time they sat on a sofa in the gold room making believe to have a perfectly delicious time.

Diantha timed her arrival for a moment after the party had got under way. Myra prepared the minds of the other ladies for her.

"My dear, I've got a novelty to spring later."

"What's that, Myra?"

"A little girl from the country. The real thing! Baby blue eyes, peachy complexion, innocent and frolicsome as a heifer calf!"

"Go on, Myra! Where did you pick her up?"

"It's Diantha Lore. Colonel Flowerday's ward." ("Ward" was always spoken and received with a snigger.)

"You don't say! I'm crazy to meet her. He keeps her pretty close. She can't really be as virginal as all that!"

"You shall see for yourself directly."

"It's a good pose, though. It's about due. Positively everybody has become so cynical you simply can't go any farther in that direction."

"I thought it would be a good joke," said Myra, "if we all played up to her this afternoon. You know, cut out the vamping while she's here, and the jazzy conversation."

"Great!"

"Of course if she's going round with us regularly we couldn't keep it up. But let's break her in gradually."

"You can depend upon me, dear. I'll be as demure as a Quaker!"

With the men Diantha took a slightly different tone. "I've got a treat for you boys this afternoon; a real old-fashioned girl."

"What's the gag, Myra?"

"On the level. This little girl has never seen life, and you mustn't make her cry. It's Diantha Lore."

The gentleman laughed here.

"Hasn't the colonel showed her life?"

"No, she's reformed him."

"Well, she can reform me, too, if she wants."

"That's up to her. Meanwhile you've got to behave. If you try anything on her I'll turn you all out. As long as she's here the Eighteenth Amendment is going to be enforced. Bar's closed till after she runs home to poppa."

All this talk created for Diantha what actors call a good entrance. When she ap-

[illegible] to the [illegible] to the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

"I'm sorry for the way I acted lots of times. You swept me off my feet. I'll try to do better hereafter."

Her fingers curled warmly around the hand that held hers. "Kirwan, you're very nice this way," she murmured.

He drew her closer to him. She did not resist. His heart beat heavily and he felt the pressure of his blood in his neck veins.

"Easy! Easy!" he warned himself. You'll have to keep up the mushy line for a while yet."

When other men tried to break, Sutliffe calmly swept Diantha out of their reach.

When the music stopped they strolled into the temporary conservatory. Myra, whose apparently indifferent eyes missed nothing, saw them go, and sent her husband to tell the musicians they might take fifteen minutes' intermission.

In the conservatory was a door leading into a little room—a dressing room ordinarily—which had for the afternoon been converted into Titania's bower. Myra had shown it to Sutliffe. In the interim, the door being closed, none of the other dancers had discovered it. Sutliffe now opened the door and lifted a light curtain that hung within.

"How lovely!" exclaimed Diantha. "A doll's fairyland!"

"Just for us!" murmured Sutliffe.

"How did you know about it?" she asked.

"Saw a couple come out a while ago," he answered glibly. "I closed the door so nobody else would find it until we were through dancing."

The walls were hung all round with a dark blue material, simulating night. High up in one corner was a baby spotlight, *i. e.*, the moon, casting down its beams on a thread of water which rose from a tiny fountain in the middle of the bower. The intended effect was of a corner of an old formal garden. A hedge of growing boxwood was ranged about, and facing the fountain was a curiously wrought bench heaped with cushions.

Diantha sank on the cushions, taking it all in.

"What a lot of trouble for Myra to take!"

Sutliffe was by the door. "Oh, she just gave the order to a florist," he said.

He closed the door, and the curtain of blue stuff fell in place.

"Leave it open!" Diantha said quickly.

"It spoils everything," he grumbled.

"Please, Kirwan."

"Can't you trust me?"

Diantha got up. "It's not that. In somebody else's house like this. Oh, don't you see?"

"People will be breaking in on us," he said sullenly.

She stamped her foot in a little burst of irritation.

"Foolish man! It's you who spoil everything! Don't you see that I can be lots nicer to you if the door's open?"

He opened the door with an ill grace.

As he came and sat beside her Diantha touched his hand. "Don't be cross," she pleaded. "Show me that nice self of yours."

It was a difficult rôle for him to play. But he had seen how like a charm it worked. He struggled with himself. "I thought," he muttered, "after that dance together—"

"But how could we—here?" asked Diantha with seeming frankness. "We'll have to go back in a minute or two. I can't put on a mask like these New York women. I'd give everything away in my face."

"It's always some other place, some other time," he complained. "When can I see you? I'm not asked to the house any more."

"I know," said Diantha, "the colonel—"

"It drives me wild," muttered Sutliffe, "to think of you there—with him."

Diantha opened her eyes. "But why?" sist on keeping up *that* pretense?" He adroitly changed his line. "And all these men here, privileged to put their arms around you!"

"Silly! You know I love dancing. But there isn't a man here I'd look twice at. The old ones—are old. The young ones—don't seem quite real. Dancing manikins."

"I hate to see a man's hand profane you," he murmured. "You're so sweet, so wonderful!"

A dimple came in Diantha's cheek. She looked down at her fingers.

Sutliffe caught one of her hands and pressed it to his lips.

"I adore you!" he murmured.

"Oh, Kirwan—" The situation was developing too fast for Diantha. She had to keep it going for some time yet. "Tell me something about yourself," she said quickly. "Do you know, I know nothing about you? What do you do?"

"Nothing useful," he said carelessly. "My dad left me too much money."

Diantha smiled to herself. Sutliffe's father had been a bookkeeper in a Chicago bank.

"But since I've known you I've become disgusted with my idle life," he went on.

"Then why not change it?"

"Don't know how to begin by myself. If I had an inspiration like you in my life I could do things." Inwardly he was full of sardonic laughter. "This is the stuff they fall for!" he thought.

"This is your better self!" said Diantha softly. "Why do you make believe to be scornful and self-satisfied?"

"I shan't with you," he said humbly.

And so the game went on.

But she was too lovely, too appealing; he could not hold himself in for long. His arm crept around her waist. She put it away from her; he put it back.

"What time is it, Kirwan?" she asked nervously.

He laughed. "You funny child! What difference does it make?"

"No, but I want to know."

He indulgently drew out his watch, an expensive repeater. When he pressed a spring a delicate little bell tinkled inside. Two strokes, a pause, then three more. "Two forty-five," he said.

"Fifteen minutes!" thought Diantha.

Meanwhile the arm was ever drawing her closer, and his hot breath was in her neck. "Diantha, kiss me," he whispered.

"Kirwan, please! I've still almost your plans."

"Not now—kiss me, Diantha!"

She jumped up. "Will you force me to leave the room?"

By way of answer he glided to the door and closed it, and put his back against it. He stood glowering at her. "How long do you think you're going to keep this up—playing with me? I've had enough! We're going to have a showdown right now!"

Diantha was least afraid of him when he was in a rage. Her chin went up.

"All right," she said. "let's have a showdown! Do you think you can ever force me to do something I don't choose to do?"

There was a silent battle between their eyes. Diantha won because he was terrified of losing her, and she had nothing to lose. When she saw his eyes waver and fall, she made her voice kind again.

"Come and sit down. You needn't open the door."

Thus a crisis was passed. Diantha knew that her victory could be but a momentary one. Passion overcame the man in successive waves, each a little higher than the last.

For a while they talked about Sutliffe's mythical business plans. He had a hard time keeping his mind fixed on it. His eyes were glazed and irresponsible.

"If you would take me you could do what you wanted with me," he murmured.

Diantha snatched at any chance to prolong the discussion. "Are you asking me to marry you?" she murmured demurely.

It took him sharply aback. He looked at her with an extraordinary expression, half a snarl.

"Would you, if I did?" he muttered.

"I don't know. You haven't," she said.

"By God! You're a hardy woman!"

"You have called me pretty nearly everything by now," laughed Diantha.

"Do you consider yourself fit to marry me?" he snarled.

It did not anger her. Time was passing. "How can I say?" she countered. "I don't know how bad you are."

"Bad enough to love you to distraction!"

His arm went around her again.

"Be careful!"

He took the cajoling line.

"Diantha! Be a little sweet to me! I want you so! Let me put my cheek against yours. See! I'm not going to bite you! Turn your head a little, sweetheart. Just two inches, and our lips will meet—"

"What time is it?" asked Diantha.

"Damn!"

He dropped her with an oath.

Diantha swallowed her laughter. "Let me hear that dear little bell ring again."

He sullenly obeyed her. The watch struck three times and stopped. Three o'clock! Diantha's breast was flooded with relief. She could go now.

He sought to pick up the tender note just where it had been dropped. The arm again. "Diantha, your lips!"

She stood up. "I've got to go now."

He jumped up, scowling at her. He did not think she meant it. But she walked coolly to the door and opened it. He was after her with a bound, but by that time she was outside. There were others in the purple room, and he could make no demonstration there. Diantha walked coolly across the room and down the corridor, with the scowling Sutliffe at her shoulder. When she disappeared into the ladies' dressing room he was obliged to wait outside the door.

Diana asked Myra's maid for her coat. "Is there another way out of this room?" she inquired.

This maid was not the smiling Fanny, but an experienced Gallic damsel, who took life as it came. "*Oui, mademoiselle*, through the bathroom and down the service passage to the maids' rooms."

"And can I get out of the building without being seen?"

"Certainement! The service elevator. If *mademoiselle* will condescend—"

The transfer of a bill from Diantha to Lizette facilitated the former's escape.

Sutliffe was still waiting outside the other door.

Diantha found the colonel already at home. "The letters?" she asked eagerly. "Have we got them?"

He shrugged good-humoredly. "A complete fizzle, my dear!"

"Oh-h!" said Diantha. "What happened?"

"Have you ever been in a safety deposit vault?"

She shook her head.

"Well, it's lined all around with hundreds of little steel safes. Each of these safes requires two keys to open it, a master key which is in the hands of the attendant, and the individual key which the customer holds. Inside the safe is a locked steel box to which the customer holds the only key. Well, when the outer safe was locked and the box pulled out, it was discovered that Sutliffe had had the wit to seal it with wax. The vault attendant would not allow my man to break the seal. It would have cost him his job, you see. So we're just where we started."

Diantha's heart sunk. She had had about enough of Sutliffe now. Her curiosity was amply satisfied.

"You're home early," said the colonel.

"Oh, the party was beginning to get rough," said Diantha carelessly.

"Anything unpleasant occur?" he asked with a shade of anxiety.

"No, indeed!"

"Sutliffe not getting beyond you?"

Diantha lied stoutly. "On the contrary, I'm learning better how to handle him."

"Good!" said Colonel Flowerday. "Then we'll start a new line."

CHAPTER XXI.

KITTSON.

RANDAL was not very sucessful in forgetting Diantha. It caused Nancy Guyon the sharpest pain to see the light go out of her boy's eyes, and the old sunken, dogged look return. She guessed, of course, that something had happened to destroy his faith in Diantha, but had no means of knowing what it was. Randal, whose determination to thrash Sutliffe had not abated, still kept up his training. Only he never ran past the colonel's house any more. He set his course in the other direction; halfway round the park and back.

Soon he and Nancy resumed their afternoon walks, though not in the same comfortable intimacy as heretofore. His terror that she might reopen the subject of Diantha was so obvious that Nancy leaned over backward in her desire to avoid it. Gradually Randal became more at ease with his mother, though he was still pricked by the feeling that, after all, he had told her in the beginning he owed her some sort of explanation now.

Finally it came out one afternoon, very hurriedly and lamely: "Nancy, the reason I never talk about—what we used to talk about is because I'm cured—absolutely cured."

"Yes, dear," she said, lowering her head to hide the springing tears. It was so obvious that he was not cured. She could not forbear one question: "Is it because you found you were mistaken in her, Ran?"

"No! No!" he said violently. "But my hands are tied!"

Though he had given up all hope he brooded on Diantha constantly. Such unselfish brooding gives one in time a certain clairvoyance in respect to the object. Randal guessed that it was Sutliffe who had set Myra upon Diantha. In pursuit of this idea he looked up some mutual acquaintances and made cautious inquiries. George Bricklym told him of the party at Myra's. The fact of the party confirmed Randal's suspicions. He smelled a conspiracy. It maddened him, he felt so powerless to act.

One day he was on his way to Oddie's rooms when he met Sutliffe coming out of the house. The two young men passed without any sign of recognition. Getting out of the elevator Randal yielded to an impulse. Instead of going to Oddie's door he rang Sutliffe's bell across the landing.

Kittson opened the door. The waxen, impassive face broke up in pleasure at the sight of Randal.

"Mr. Randal! You! This is a surprise. But you don't look real well, sir. Will you come in?"

Randal shook his head. "I want to talk to you, Kittson. But not here. Will you come across to Mr. Oddie's flat for a minute?"

"Yes, sir; certainly, sir."

"Where's Sutliffe?"

"Gone for the afternoon, sir."

Kittson followed Randal across the landing. Randal had a key to Oddie's apartment. Oddie was away. Randal led the way into the little book-lined den, where a faint, pleasant reek of tobacco still hung on the air. Face to face with Kittson respectfully awaiting his communication, Randal's tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and words deserted him. Honest fellow though Kittson was, it seemed impossible to open so intimate a matter to a servant.

Kittson, seeing his distress, helped him out.

"Mr. Oddie is a reader, I see," he remarked, glancing around at the books.

Randal was grateful for the respite. "Yes. How are hydrostatics getting along, Kittson?"

"Slowly, sir. It's an abstruse subject. Excellent training for the mind."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"I scarcely know, sir. The great thing is the mental training. You didn't read that book I gave you, sir."

"No," said Randal contritely. "Could not put my mind to it. In the excitement I left it behind."

"You would find it an excellent sedative, sir."

"Just what I need, eh?"

"Will you try it again if I send it to you, sir?"

"Yes, and thank you, Kittson." Once Randal's mind was taken off the subject which oppressed it, the words began to come of their own accord. "Kittson, I haven't forgotten what you and I said to each other the night I left."

"Thank you, sir, there isn't a day but what I have thought of it, too, and wished there was something I could do to help you."

"What made you think I needed help?" the queasy Randal demanded.

"I could see something was troubling you, sir."

"Well—I've come to you for help now, Kittson."

Kittson's old face worked with emotion and pleasure.

"Oh, Mr. Randal! Anything! Anything!"

Randal blurted out: "The real cause of the quarrel between Sutliffe and me was a young lady."

"Yes, sir."

"How did you know that?" cried Randal sharply. "Did you overhear anything?"

"No, sir. But it always is, isn't it? Young men—"

"But this is quite different, Kittson," Randal said eagerly. "I want you to be

sure to get it right. This is a good girl—a lady, very young."

"I knew it was a serious matter, sir."

"She's in bad hands!" cried Randal, quite forgetting himself at last. "That's what drives me wild to think of. Her name is Diantha Lore. Did you ever hear that name mentioned?"

"Not that I can recall, sir."

"I want you to remember it."

"I shall never forget it now, sir."

"And I don't want you to get any idea into your head that this is a case of jealousy between Sutliffe and me. Whatever may happen there's nothing in it for me. The young lady doesn't care for me. Never will. I believe Sutliffe is plotting to do her harm. Have you ever seen anything or heard anything in there that would bear that out? Think hard!"

Kittson slowly shook his head.

"I believe there's a Mrs. Cheeseman mixed up in it, too," Randal went on. "Has she ever been to Sutliffe's flat?"

"Not while I was there, sir. Sometimes he sends me out when he's expecting a visitor."

"Does he talk to her over the telephone?"

"I don't know, sir. Don't always hear the names of the parties he talks to."

"Her given name is Myra," said Randal.

Kittson's face lighted up. "Oh, yes, sir. He often talks to a lady called Myra."

"What do they say to each other?" demanded Randal eagerly. "Have you ever heard anything that would suggest a plot—harm to another woman?"

"No, sir. He's very guarded on his talk over the phone. The boys downstairs listen, you see. This Myra called him up just before he went out to-day."

"What did you hear?"

Kittson shook his head. "Nothing of any account, sir. The other party did most of the talking. All I could gather was that something they were bothered about was all right. He was in a fine good humor when he went out."

"That means everything is all wrong for us!" said Randal bitterly.

"I took it that he went up to her place to talk things over," said Kittson. "I'll watch and listen more careful in the future, sir."

"Yes," said Randal, "that's what I wanted to ask of you. Under other circumstances I'd never think of asking you to go against your boss. But this is serious. And I'm not asking anything for myself. Only for her. Where the safety of a young girl is concerned we're justified in doing anything!"

"Don't you worry about that, sir," said Kittson grimly. "I earn my wages good—with what and all I have to put up with. Apart from that I owe him nothing. I'll go through his letters."

"No!" cried Randal in horror. "I couldn't have you do that! There wouldn't be anything in writing, anyhow. I forbid you to touch his letters!"

"Very well, sir," said Kittson with a demure air that suggested he would use his own discretion in obeying.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE COUNTERPLOT.

MYRA was not a little bothered by Diantha's abrupt departure from her party. Sutliffe disappeared at about the same time, and she had no opportunity of obtaining an explanation from him. She did not call Diantha up on the telephone. On the whole, it seemed safest to call for Diantha at the usual hour next morning, just as if nothing had happened.

Naturally Diantha, whatever her private feelings, had to receive her with undiminished friendliness. Myra was secretly relieved. It appeared from Diantha's explanations that Sutliffe had been a little too ardent the day before, but no serious harm had been done. Diantha was prepared to receive Myra's excuses for the enamored young man with an indulgent air.

"The whole miserable party was a fiasco!" said Myra, self-accusingly. "I was almost afraid to come here this morning."

"How silly!" said Diantha. "It wasn't your fault."

"I'm afraid you'll never be willing to come to my house again," hinted Myra.

"Why, of course I will," said Diantha.

"You dear!" said Myra. "But no more parties. One can't control a party when the men bring their own— Will you come to dinner at my house some night? Just you and Sutliffe, Henry and I."

"Love to," said Diantha. "Some night when the colonel's dining out."

"Set your own time, my dear, and I'll arrange it."

"I'll let you know," said Diantha.

That afternoon Myra summoned Sutliffe to her apartment, and gave him a piece of her mind. "Do you want to spoil everything?"

But Sutliffe was sullen. "You may have been right in the beginning," he said, "but it's gone too far now. This girl is prepared to string me along indefinitely. I'm going to show her now. I've had enough of her high and mighty attitude. I mean to break it down. Just give me the chance, that's all. It's ridiculous to pay court to old man Flowerday's mistress as if she were a virtuous woman! Only swells her head!"

"She may not be his mistress," murmured Myra.

"Ah, tell that to the marines!"

Myra loved intrigue for its own sake, and had any amount of patience in weaving her plots. But she saw that in Sutliffe she had a recalcitrant weapon. She must use him as she could.

"All right," she said with a shrug. "I'll give you your chance. The rest is up to you."

"When?" he asked eagerly.

"The night she comes here to dinner."

"Here?"

"No, you fool! What do you think I am? Afterward in your own place."

Sutliffe's eyes glittered.

[illegible] Diantha Myra [illegible] "We might [illegible] go to the theater afterward. And Sutliffe is crazy to have us come around and see his rooms. I suppose it would be all right so long as you have an old married woman like me along."

"Surely!" said Diantha. "I'd love to see his place. If only the colonel stays out long enough."

"Oh, well, let's wait until some night when we know he's going to be safely out of the way."

At luncheon Diantha remarked to the colonel: "Myra and Sutliffe are now planning to entice me to Sutliffe's rooms some night. Quite like a melodrama, isn't it?"

"Ha!" cried the colonel with interest. "We could turn that to our advantage. You wouldn't be afraid to go, would you, provided I took ample measures for your safety?"

"Certainly not," said Diantha stoutly.

"What night?" he asked.

"That's for you to say. It's supposed to be the first night when you're going to be out."

"Good! That will give me time to prepare. Let me see. The woman will be horribly in the way—"

"Oh, I fancy we'll lose Myra somewhere," said Diantha dryly. "The whole thing smells of a conspiracy."

"Of course!" said the colonel. "Let me think. I ought to have at least a week. Next Friday night—that is, a week from to-morrow, there's a banquet of the Latin-America Association at the Madagascar. Tell them I'm going to that. Tell them it will be an all-night affair."

Diantha nodded. "But you said the letters weren't in Sutliffe's rooms."

"I'll have them there that night, my dear."

Colonel Flowerday now desired to talk to Mrs. Guyon again. For obvious reasons he could not write to her, and to call her upon the telephone was no less dangerous, since Mrs. Guyon talked through a switchboard in the Guyon house, and servants were [illegible] to listen in. The colonel looked up [illegible] his appointment in a book of the Knickerbocker Society under the date of the F— [illegible] night. Mrs. Guyon was named among the patroness. She would certainly be present.

For several years Colonel Flowerday had [illegible] to enter the exclusive circle that Mrs. Guyon adorned, but he had friends and connections—not always acknowledged—in every circle, and it was not at all difficult for him to obtain an invitation to even so exclusive an affair as the Knickerbocker

dance. As Diantha was going to bed that night, he set off for it, magnificent as ever in his evening dress.

He was not much impressed by the "brilliance" of the occasion. An old story to him. After all, less exclusive parties were more amusing. There were plenty of gay young people present, but there was also a line of hang-overs from the previous generation, who constituted themselves censors, and only succeeded in being wet blankets.

Having satisfied himself that Mrs. Guyon was present, and letting her see him, the colonel quietly bided his time. Sutliffe was present, and it would hardly have been safe for him to ask Nancy to dance, or to be seen talking with her apart.

His chance came when he saw her dancing with Forbes Bostwick, a much-run-after man in that set. The colonel picked up a neglected former beauty, a Mrs. Carmody, and sat out with her, meanwhile covertly following the other couple with his eyes. The colonel never danced. When he saw Nancy and her partner turn into the long corridor at the rear of the ballroom, he suggested to Mrs. Carmody that they take a stroll.

The two couples came face to face in a verdant alley. All four were acquainted, and they fell into light talk. Other couples passed them continually. Nancy was exquisite in white messaline and silver lace. She saw in the colonel's eye that this was no accidental meeting, and helped him out. Mrs. Carmody, too, charmed to have an opportunity of talking to Forbes Bostwick, helped him out, too, unwittingly. In a moment or two the quartet had divided into two couples. In another moment or two a yard or so separated them.

Since Mrs. Carmody had lowered her voice it was perfectly natural for the colonel to do so, too.

"Nancy," he murmured out of a smiling masklike face, "I want you to enter into negotiations with Sutliffe's lawyer to buy those letters."

She, too, had on her politely smiling mask. "But you know I have tried that, Crispin. He asks a preposterous price."

"I know. I don't want you to buy them. But only to negotiate. Ask him to make an offer. Then make a counter offer. Spin it along for a few days. Next Thursday—mark this well—write and accept whatever his latest offer may be, and appoint Saturday morning for a meeting."

"I understand," she said, laughing delicately as at a jest.

"Listen hard. You must stipulate that Sutliffe personally is to hand over the letters to you, and receive securities in return. And you must appoint the hour of eight thirty on Saturday morning for the meeting. Give any reason you like for this hour."

She nodded gayly.

"It doesn't make any difference where you appoint the meeting to take place, for I don't want you to go there. Nor, unless my plans miscarry, will Sutliffe be there, either. You understand?"

"Perfectly."

"That's all, then. Very enjoyoble affair, isn't it?".

Mrs. Guyon stole a lightning glance at the other couple. The flirtatious Mrs. Carmody still held Bostwick deep in whispered converse.

"Oh, Crispin," she murmured, "I do so want to have a real talk with you. I suppose it isn't safe!"

He shook his head.

"Sutliffe is here. Doubtless watching you. We mustn't start him thinking."

"I wanted to ask you about this girl, Diantha Lore."

"What have you heard about her?" he asked sharply.

"Oh—what every one hears. Is she—is she like the last one you had working for you?"

"Good God, no!" he said, startled. "I never thought you'd believe such talk. She's a girl in a thousand, Nancy. A girl after your own heart!"

"They say—they say," she murmured breathlessly, "that you have become very much attached to her."

"Ah, that much is true, anyway," said the colonel beaming. "Though not perhaps in the way they think. I adore her, Nancy. She has changed the whole color of my life!"

Mrs. Guyon lowered her lashes. Her smile was unchanged. A dull, grinding pain

gripped her breast. "My poor Randal!" she thought. "I cannot help you!"

The music started again.

"Here's the next dance!" cried Mrs. Carmody vivaciously. "Do take me back, colonel. I have it with the most fascinating creature!"

A day or two later Diantha called up Myra. She said: "Oh, Myra, dear, I've just learned that the colonel is going to attend the Latin-America banquet on Friday night."

"Fine, darling! Did you ask him what time he would be home?"

"Said he was going to make a night of it."

"Splendid!"

"Are you sure Friday night will suit you, Myra?"

"Absolutely, love. I'll call up Sutliffe at once."

She did. And in a quarter of an hour he was in her apartment. They congratulated each other.

"Like the direct interposition of Providence!" said Myra.

"Or the devil," suggested Sutliffe in a high, good humor.

For an hour in the parrot room they had their heads together. Better than anything else in the world Myra loved plotting her situations in advance. So clever was she, and so heedless most other people, that she was generally successful in bringing things around the way she wanted. She now went into the minutest detail; what she was to say; what Sutliffe was to say; how they were to act in every contingency. Sutliffe, with a man's impatience, chafed at these elaborate arrangements, but with Myra it had to be all or nothing; either he had to submit to her in every particular, or she washed her hands of the whole affair.

As Sutliffe rose to go he said: "I'll get the theater tickets."

"If you want more time, pick out a stupid show, and we'll leave in the middle," said Myra.

On Friday evening when Diantha was dressed, ready to start for Myra's, the colonel came and gave her final instructions.

"Nervous, dear?" he asked.

"Not at all!" said Diantha quickly. Not for worlds would she have confessed how her breast was fluttering.

He took a small automatic from his pocket.

"You ought to carry this. How can you conceal it?" he asked with an anxious glance at her tight bodice.

"I prepared for it," said Diantha coolly. "Slit a seam in the back of my skirt and put in a pocket."

"Just where a man carries his," said the colonel, smiling.

"It 'll be darned uncomfortable if I happen to sit on it," said Diantha.

"Ever fire a pistol?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Better unload it, anyway," she said. "I wouldn't want to shoot him, really. It will be enough just to produce it. You will be near, anyway."

The colonel nodded and emptied the shells into his hand. Diantha slipped the weapon into her pocket.

"Everything has gone all right so far," said the colonel. "Mrs. Guyon made an appointment with Sutliffe for eight thirty to-morrow morning. Consequently he had to get the letters out before closing time this afternoon. To-night when you visit him they will either be upon his person, or concealed somewhere in the apartment. Your job, of course, is to find out where the letters are, and, if possible, to get your hands on them.

"Sutliffe's apartment has a whole line of windows opening on the side street," he went on. "I and some of my men will be watching those windows from across the street. If you need help you are to throw up one of the windows. A forcible entry by us would make a lot of unpleasant publicity, of course. But you mustn't take any unnecessary risks. If you can't get the window up, break the glass."

Diantha asked: "Has Mrs. Guyon ever described the letters?"

"Yes. There are ten letters. They are all written on the same heavy, roughish papers, robin's egg blue in color. Probably somewhat yellowed by age. When the sheets are folded once across they are almost square. Can't say whether they are

still in their original envelopes. If so, the envelopes are addressed to Mr. Boardman Ware at the Chronos Club."

"Where would a man carry letters on his person?"

The colonel illustrated the inside breast pocket.

"I think I have everything straight now," said Diantha.

"One thing I have not mentioned before," said the colonel. "I've arranged to have a man trail your party all evening. If there's any departure from the original plan proposed by Myra, I'll quickly be informed of it."

Myra welcomed Diantha with many apologies for the absence of Henry. "The poor fellow had a dinner and conference at his club that he couldn't possibly get out of. He was brokenhearted. I asked Dimmock to fill in. He's pleasantly harmless."

Diantha was not at all surprised at the suppression of Henry. Henry might be feeble, but he would not stand for such work as had been planned for this night.

Diantha and Sutliffe had no moment alone before dinner. That was part of Myra's arrangements.

"Mustn't risk a premature climax," she had said to Sutliffe. "Wait till the stage is all set."

The dinner was not a very brilliant affair. All of them had the sense of something impending. That didn't feaze Myra at all, but it was never part of Myra's rôle to exert herself to be entertaining. She languidly left that to others. Sutliffe was nervous, over-trained for the affair, maybe; and Diantha was oppressed by all sorts of feelings. The major part of the talk thus fell to Dimmock, who kept up an agreeable noise without saying anything in particular. The passé youth was neither handsome nor clever, but he had one inestimable virtue; like the chameleon he instantly took the color of his surroundings, and his only aim was to please. Myra found him very useful. He would take anything from her.

They had no time to linger over the coffee cups. The green landaulet carried them to the theater. Myra and Diantha sat on the back seat, the two men sitting forward.

Sutliffe proved to have been not unsuccessful in his search for a stupid play. It was the drama of a hot-headed juvenile—middle-aged—who quarreled with his papa—obviously younger than he—and went out West to buck bronchos or something. The first act in which this highly original scheme was laid out was endless, and the second act in which the high-born heroine sacrificed her pride and went after him to be a cowgirl, threatened to be drearier still. The young man, of course, was discovered in a compromising situation with a near-Spanish lady, *et cetera, et cetera*. The most depressing thing about the performance was the serious way in which the audience sat and took it all in.

Diantha could get fun out of almost anything. Once or twice in the beginning a chuckle escaped her, but it rang strangely in the still theater and she was abashed. Thereafter she suffered keenly. They discussed the play among themselves in sarcastic whispers, and Sutliffe was probably objurgated for having inflicted it on them. Myra become more and more impatient. Finally, in the middle of the second act, she stood up saying:

"I'm not going to stand it another minute."

They filed out. The rest of the audience looked at them in virtuous disapproval. Audiences are much too polite. If they more frequently exercised their privilege of walking out they'd get better plays.

Outside the chauffeur was instructed to take them to the little apartment house almost opposite the cathedral.

As Myra, Diantha, and Dimmock entered the elevator, Sutliffe hung behind for a moment. To the boy at the telephone he said in an undertone:

"If anybody calls to-night I'm not in. I don't want to be bothered by the telephone, either."

"Yes, sir."

"There'll be a waiter later. Let him up, of course, but nobody else, you understand."

"Yes, sir."

Upstairs the bland and waxen Kittson admitted them to the apartment. He preceded them into the living room to turn on

the lights. Kittson did not know who the guests were until he heard Sutliffe say:

"Nothing gorgeous here, like your place, Myra."

Kittson sized up that lady in a sharp, veiled glance.

Myra said:

"Oh, Diantha, see these funny little china monkeys!"

Kittson got a shock upon hearing that name. His startled eyes dwelt on the girl compassionately. Nobody was looking at Kittson, of course. His brain began to work fast.

Sutliffe followed the servant out of the room.

"Kittson," he said, "I want you to telephone Clarètie's to send in a supper for two in—say, half an hour."

"For two, sir?"

"For two, I said. Let me see—iced bouillon, squab en aspic, asparagus, ices, petits fours. Get Armand, the head waiter, on the phone and tell him who it's for. Armand knows."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't forget this. The waiter is to ring three times, so I'll know who it is."

"Three times, sir."

"Get the coffee machine ready to start, and put a couple of bottles of my '04 champagne to ice. After you have done that you can take the night off."

"The night off, sir?"

"Yes, yes," said Sutliffe, impatiently. "Don't want to see you again until noon to-morrow. Here's a twenty for you."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," stammered Kittson.

Sutliffe returned to the living room wearing a picturesque maroon velvet smoking jacket. He made some light apology about "wanting to be comfortable." The bizarre garment was decidedly becoming.

Diantha wondered what had become of the dress coat. It had set so smoothly on his broad chest during dinner she did not see how any packet of letters could be concealed in the pocket, but she wanted to make sure.

She expressed a desire to see the apartment, and they all set off on a tour of inspection. In Sutliffe's bedroom, the room nearest the front door, she say the coat thrown over the back of a chair. She managed to brush against it so that it fell to the floor. Stooping to pick it up, she turned it inside out, she laid it back. The breast pocket was empty.

Next to Sutliffe's room was the dining room, then the living room, which occupied the corner of the building. The bedroom, once occupied by Randal Guyon, opened off the living room, with a window on the avenue, while kitchen, pantry, servant's room, *et cetera*, were on the inside of the building, across the hall that ran from front door to living room.

Back in the living room again, Diantha spotted a handsome mahogany cabinet that served no ostensible purpose.

"Is this a camouflaged phonograph?" she asked lightly. "Let's have a tune."

"That's my strong box," said Sutliffe.

"Doesn't look very strong."

"Wait till you see the inside." He took a little key from the top drawer of his desk alongside.

"Is that where you keep the key? How considerate!" laughed Diantha.

"Oh, this key doesn't count."

He opened the wooden door of the cabinet, and inside was revealed a sphere of steel sufficient to intimidate the most enterprising of burglars. Into its round face a door was let in, with the usual handle and combination dial.

There was a spot of color in Diantha's either cheek, and her heart was beating fast. Could she charm him into opening it?

"I saw a play once," she said, "in which a crook was supposed to open a safe like that by turning the knob and *listening!* Do you suppose that's possible?"

"Just a playwright's dream, I guess," laughed Dimmock.

"[illegible] lost the combination?" asked Diantha.

"You couldn't lose it," said Sutliffe. "It's etched inside your skull like your own name."

"What is a combination, anyhow?" laughed Diantha. "It's something you're always hearing about, but I don't know."

"I'll show you," said Sutliffe, dropping to one knee in front of the safe.

Diantha glanced fearfully at Myra. Surely Myra must see how excited she was. But Myra was merely bored and indifferent. Dimmock was a foolish, light-minded sort of person. He didn't count.

Sutliffe twirled the knob of the dial rapidly from right to left and back again, slowing up between, to bring the indicator to a certain number. Diantha knew very well what a combination was; the colonel had instructed her. And now, quick as Sutliffe's movements were, her eyes followed them. He started at ten on the dial, made two complete turns to the left and stopped at thirty, three turns to the right, stopping at seventy, and a half turn back to twenty. The handle of the safe turned in his hand. He opened the door part-way and swung it back. Not so quick, though, but Diantha had a glimpse of a packet of yellowish-blue letters on a shelf inside!

Sutliffe locked the safe, gave the dial a twirl, locked the outer door. They talked gayly of other things. But now the combination was etched inside Diantha's skull, too.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

THE CONQUEROR

SEE, there he comes!
Oh, the gay pride of him,
Youth in the stride of him,
Trumpets and drums!

All the street stares,
Turning to glance at him,
Soft eyes askance at him;
Little he cares!

Never a pause,
Taking as due to him
What may accrue to him,
Love and applause.

Careless and proud—
That is their part of him;
But the deep heart of him
Hid from the crowd!

Simple and frank—
Traitors, be wise of him!
Are not the eyes of him
Pledge of his rank?

Vigor and tan—
Look at the strength of him;
Oh, the good length of him!
That is my man!

Marian West.

His for a Song

By LESLIE RAMÓN

WHEN Andrew Lorimer came back from town he stood for a moment in the doorway of the room where for more years than he cared to count he had lived with his dreams and memories of —the past. The walk up the hill from the village station had tired him, and he was breathing a trifle heavily, but it was not a purely physical weariness that caused Andrew to lean against the door frame. His was a fatigue of the spirit. All his life Andrew had been trying to reconcile things-as-they-were with what he thought they ought to be. He had fought the nearly always losing battle of the idealist; given his youth and mature years to the production of verse and tuneful song. He had dared to be a poet-composer and pledged himself and his beloved to suspense and poverty. Now—Andrew Lorimer's dreamy eyes were dim; his hair was white; his beloved had gone onward. He was alone with—*success*.

There is a bitterness to continual failure in reward of unremitting endeavor; but how measure the heartache of the victor when the laurels of triumph come—too late?

As he moved away from the door Andrew's mouth quivered. There was a stifled sobbing quaver in his sigh. He looked aimlessly about the dusty, untidy room. Here, in work, he had found solace from lonesomeness.

He glanced over the table littered with sheets of paper. There he had spun words to charm and give hope to others. He had found distraction; some measure of comfort in shaping vital thoughts to simple phrase. Over by the window was the old-fashioned grand piano, where he had sat late o' nights seeking the melody to carry the joyous lilt or poignant sadness of his songs. Now—there was no further incentive to labor. Andrew Lorimer had—arrived! Each month when he went to town his publishers handed him a check of overwhelming value, but although he went to the bank and turned those checks into legal tender, not a cent of those royal-

ties had he spent or brought back with him to his country home.

A lonely man usually lives frugally, and the habit of making ends meet on the proceeds of some of his earlier songs clung to Andrew. Besides this, and greater than material considerations, was his deep, personal feeling toward the song which had brought him such great monetary reward and so much secret fame.

He went over to the piano. On the rack was a sheet of music. It did not bear the name Andrew Lorimer, but all the same, those touching words and wooing, haunting melody were his. The title of the song was: "Gal o' Mine." Andrew, the lonely singer, might pass away and be forgotten, but his song would never die.

Yes—he had put his heart into that song, and there was a subtle balm in knowing that it was being played and sung all over the world. For the rest: all the ease, the luxuries the fast-accumulating royalties would buy, Andrew had no desire. For him the call was to another plane.

His hands fell gently on the keys, and while he softly played, he gazed out over the darkening hills. In inarticulate, unuttered phrase, he was praying; hoping that his work here was done; that he would soon—soon be free to go Beyond, to where he knew his beloved was waiting for him.

Then—such is the oddness of man's mind—the practical, the material pierced his spiritual absorption. There was all that money. What should he do with it? How dispose of it? He had no relatives; no near and dear friends. He had outlived them all. Yet, something must, should be done.

With a sudden movement of decision, Andrew got up. He lighted his lamp, and there was a smile on his tired face as he took the sheet of "Gal o' Mine" from the piano and sat down at his table. The smile grew to a suggestion of boyish mischief as he wrote a few lines across the inner page of the song. And when he signed his name, he chuckled with satisfaction.

When the ink had dried, he folded the song and leaned back thoughtfully. What should he do with it? Where place it for safe-keeping? It was a small matter for consideration, but it bothered the old man. He could come to no decision. Then his thoughts drifted erratically from one subject to another. He thought of making himself a cup of tea—presently; of getting something to eat—presently. And—presently, a languor stole over Andrew and all urge to thought or movement receded from him.

II.

"I SEE old Lorimer come in on the seven twenty. Wonder what he goes up to town for? Regular every month since last December he's been going up."

This remark, proffered by the proprietor of the village store and lounging club for gossips of the male order, was prompted by idle curiosity. No one in the village could be expected to take much interest in an old man who wasted his time playing the piano and wasn't neighborly enough to take his place among men and spit and chew and talk politics and nonsense in the ring around the store stove of a winter evening, or on the steps of the post office in the summer. All the same, the storekeeper's observation brought immediate response.

"I don't give a dang what the old crank's doing in town or out of it. He ain't nothing to me, but there's one thing I ain't going to stand for, and that's his cow coming over into my place. 'Stead of gallivanting around like he does, ole Lorimer better stay home and mind his business. And I'm the one to tell him so, too. I'm going up there tonight. I'll make him mend that fence and pay damages. See if I don't."

In emphasis of this statement, Fred Truscom wrinkled his sandy eyebrows into a knot, showed a broken, yellow fang as he stuffed a wad of tobacco into his cavernous mouth, and shambled to the door.

The offspring of jealousy is spite. Here, then, was the reason for Fred Truscom's outburst over the mere mention of Andrew Lorimer's name. In some obscure way he sensed the superiority of the white-haired old man over himself. He despised Lorimer for his gentle ways: he hated him because the children ran to him whenever they saw him on the street; he sneered whenever he heard others speak with pity-

ing respect of the old man who played the piano.

Also, there was another reason for Truscom's story about the cow. The pockets of his shabby, creased clothes were empty of the thing he craved but disliked to work for. He had no money. Therefore this was an excellent opportunity to go up to Lorimer's house, start a wordy complaint, and make himself a pest and nuisance until he got—damages.

Grumbling and muttering to himself, Truscom left the village. It was a night to lure even the callous-hearted to gentler mood, but not so with Truscom. It is doubtful if he ever deigned to give a passing glance at the star-patterned sky. Certain that to him the mystery of the night was expressed in the phrase, "Plaguey dark." There are blind people with more vision than some who have eyes to see with. Arrived at Lorimer's house, Truscom went in without knocking. By way of announcing his entry and asserting his status as a brother and equal, he clumped heavily as he went along the hall to the room where the light was.

"I've come to collect for the damage your cow done," he began; and when Lorimer did not look up from his chair he repeated his plaint in louder, angrier tone.

"Sleepin'," muttered Truscom in disgust, when he found he was not favored with the slightest sign. It riled him that the old man should not instantly awake to the call of his harsh voice. He thumped across the room. It was his intention to shake Lorimer rudely, but—he did not.

When the spirit leaves the body of those who have lived the good life, the inanimate clay takes on an aloof majesty that even a vandal may hesitate to intrude upon. Besides—Fred Truscom was badly scared when he caught sight of the unmistakable pallor of the old man's down-bent face. He retreated, backed against the piano; he stood there mechanically moistening his lips and wondering what he should do. Should he rush off? Spread the news and enjoy being the center of attraction? Would there not be food and drink and tobacco and a welcome in a dozen places for one who could tell the story of the passing of Andrew Lorimer? Undoubtedly there would be, but—

While he was grasping at these possibilities of profit Truscom's eyes shifted about the room. He felt a vague sense of peevish resentment that he could see nothing of value that he could—acquire. His contemptuous glance took in the heavy furniture, the few pictures, the bronze clock and ornaments on the mantelpiece over the open fireplace, but to the ignorant eye only the tawdry and glittering has any appeal. "Junk," he muttered, and framed the thought, "Wonder if he's got any money hid away?"

Before he made any move to find a direct answer to this question Truscom backed out of the room and out of the house. He went as far as the lane and circled around in order to assure himself that there was no one about. It was a needless precaution—a refinement of craft brought about by the evilness of his intentions—but his prowling satisfied his sense of cunning. He went back to the room and lowered the lamp; then he started his search. He rummaged in drawers, looked in closets, went into the old man's bedroom and felt under the mattress, and he found nothing but disappointment.

"Nothing but an old pauper," he thought, and, returning to the front room, crept nearer to the old man. He saw lying under the lax hand the folded song. He read the title. Then, bending closer, he slipped his dirty, ghoulish hand into a pocket. He found a stub of pencil and some scraps of paper covered with writing. Next —some letters. These he replaced. Then he found a worn leather wallet. He could feel there were coins in it. A quick glance showed him that there were also some bills.

After that Truscom flitted. He went home by a circuitous route. In the shuttered secrecy of his sordid room he counted the prize of his petty, mean thievery. He had robbed Andrew Lorimer of twelve dollars and ninety-eight cents.

III.

UNTIL late the next day Fred Truscom did not venture out. It was nearly ten

when he went to the store. It surprised him to find that the place was still open, and what was more, it was crowded. There were at least a dozen people there. They were grouped in front of the counter. They all stopped talking and turned when Truscom entered.

"Say," exclaimed the storekeeper, "weren't you up to Lorimer's place last night?"

Truscom shook his head. "Didn't go near it."

"But you said you was going. Didn't you say you was going to get damages out of him for the damage his cow done?"

"Changed my mind. There ain't no law against that, is there?"

"No—but I reckon you'll want to kick yourself for all the rest of your days that you didn't go as you said you was going to."

Fred Truscom's eyes shifted furtively from face to face. It puzzled him to see that they were all regarding him with amusement rather than suspicion.

"What is it you're getting at?" he demanded.

"Old Lorimer's dead."

Truscom simulated as best he could a look of surprise.

"Too bad," he mumbled. "But I don't see what I've got to be so upset about. I won't get paid for that fence and all that, but—"

"You know that old Lorimer wrote songs?"

"I've heard he did," said Truscom cautiously.

"Ever hear of 'Gal o' Mine'?"

"Sure."

"He wrote it."

Truscom's jaw sagged; his yellow fang protruded. "He wrote that?"

"Wrote the words and the music. It's been selling like hot cakes all over. He died worth more'n a hundred thousand dollars in cash, and there's more to come."

"Did—did he have it in the house?"

"Not he. Kept it all in a safe-deposit vault in town."

Truscom leaned against the counter. He caught the storekeeper winking at one of the silent group.

"What's the game?" he snapped. "What are you all gawping at?"

"Well, it's like this," explained the storekeeper. "If you'd gone up, as you said you was going to last night, you'd have been worth a pile of money. Doctor said the old man had been dead twelve or fourteen hours when they found him this morning. So I guess he was gone by the time you said you was to be there. You shouldn't have changed—"

"But how would I have got anything?" demanded Truscom.

"Because you'd have been the first one to discover his body. He must have felt he was getting near the end. He wrote his will just before he died. Left every cent to the one who found him. Only condition is that he's to be buried next his wife. That's all. If you'd gone up there, you'd have come into all his money. As it is, it's the parson's little Clara who'll get it. She went up with some new laid eggs this morning. She found the old man sitting in his chair. His will was right there on his knee."

"On his knee," repeated Truscom in a dry whisper.

"Yes. They've been telegraphing and phoning all day, but there ain't no one to claim his money. Clara 'll get it, all right."

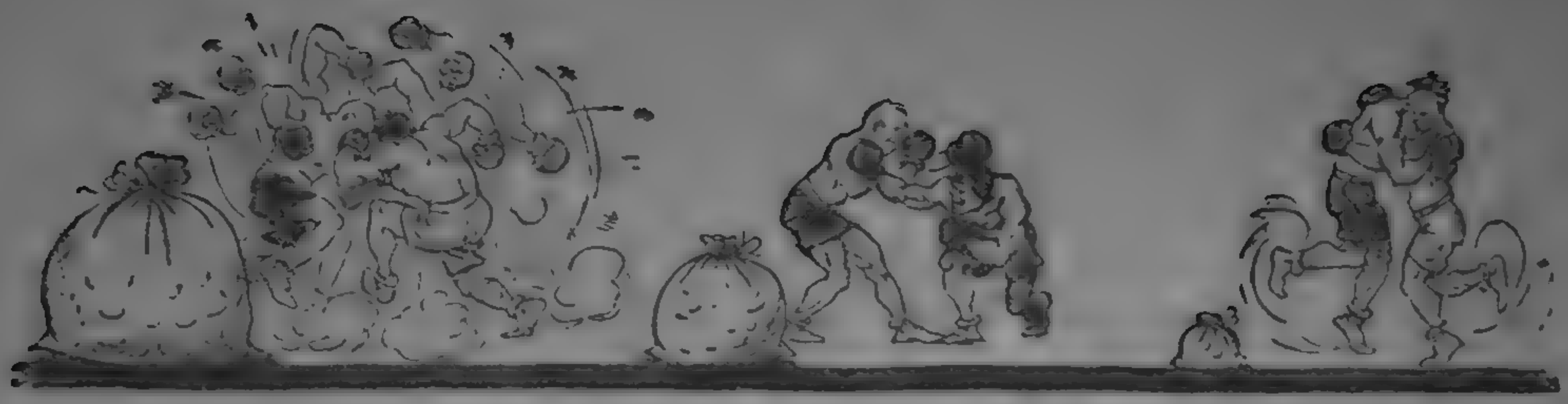
"But you say the will was on his knee—"

"That's what I'm telling you. I've seen it. It was written on that song he made such a hit with."

Fred Truscom swayed slightly. He stared vacantly. Then his face distorted with venom as he saw the smiles. What would the fools think of him if they *knew* that he had been within a few inches of that strange will? What wouldn't their laughter be if they could know that he pledged his chance of a fortune for—twelve dollars and ninety-eight cents. He croaked an oath—swung round, and lurched out of the store.

Across the street, lighted windows shone through the trees. A party was in progress. A sweetly singing voice trembled on a high note, then swung into a haunting refrain. The song was: "Gal o' Mine."

The sword of mockery turned in the gaping wound of Truscom's thwarted greed. He stumbled off into the darkness.



IZZY KAPLAN'S KOLUMN

Received via W. O. McGEEHAN

THE GATE RECEIPTS

NOT since the time when Izzy Kaplan had been mistaken for an umpire by an enthusiastic fan with a pop bottle had McGeehen seen his partner so upset as when, one night when the telegraph instrument had just clicked up the story of a fight, Izzy came stamping into the newspaper office.

His eyes blazed fire, his teeth gleamed hungrily, his hands clawed the air.

It was not that Izzy had picked the wrong man to win. Izzy is too much of an expert to let details bother him. What made Izzy froth was that as he approached the Garden a small, dark stranger had darted from one of the pillars, grabbed him by the buttonhole, and tried to sell him, Izzy Kaplan, a ticket to the fight.

For twenty minutes McGeehan abandoned his rôle of silent partner to assure Izzy that he did not look like the kind of person who pays to get into anything. At the end of that time Izzy was sufficiently coherent to give to the world his views on The Gate Receipts.—THE EDITOR.

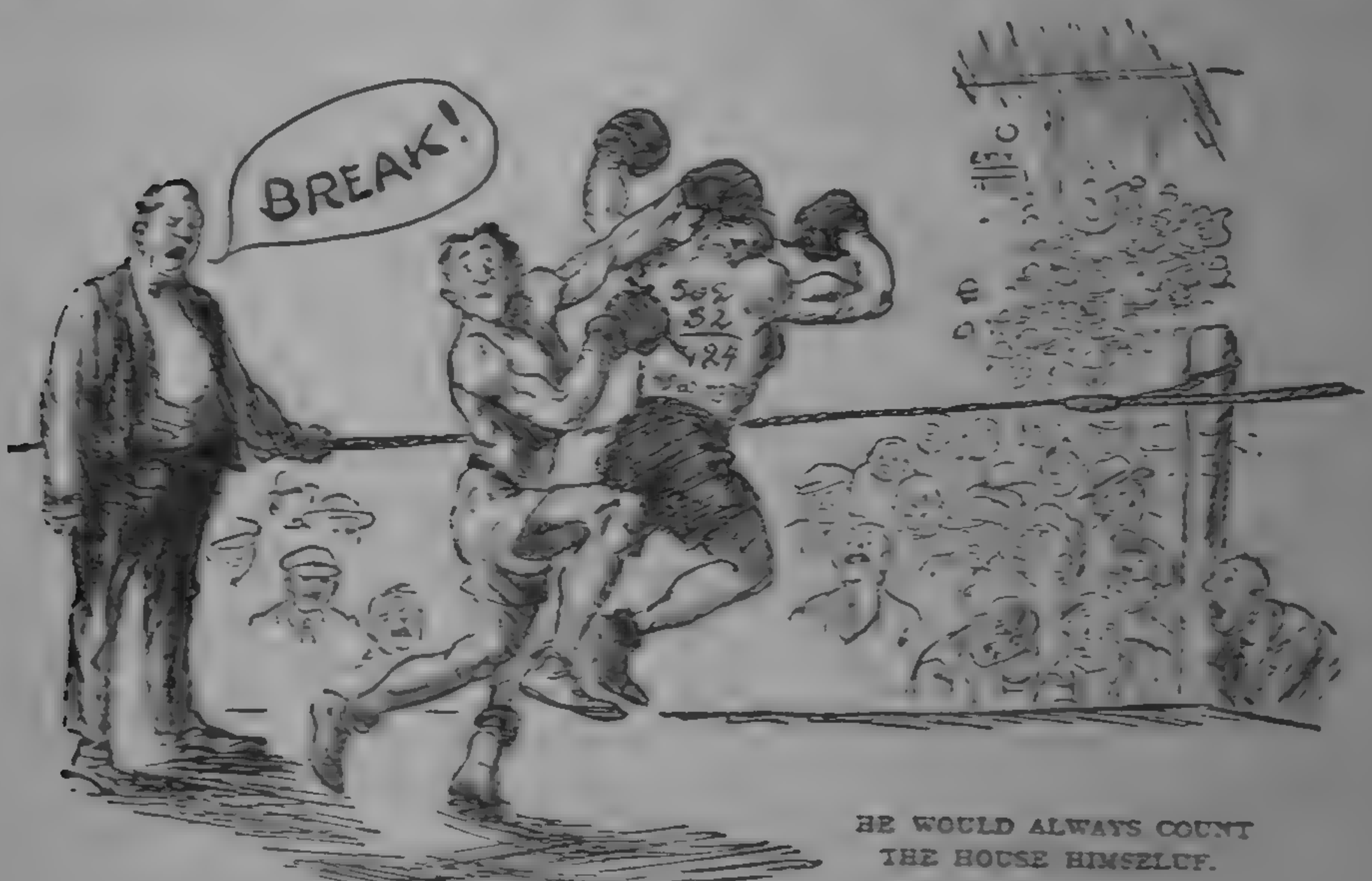
A FELLER writing into me is esking me who I would consider the biggest feller which ever was in sports. I am sorry that I couldn't mention the name on account I don't know it, but the feller, in my opinion, which he done it the biggest thing for sports, was the feller which inventioned gate reseats. Gate reseats is what the customers pay to see the show, and if there wasn't no gate reseats the sporting business would be practically nothing at all.

I was esking Benneh Leonard, which me and him is chust like that, if he would be in the box fighting business if there was no gate reseats, and he answered me pretty quick: "Izzy, I am surprised that you should think I was such a rotten business man." And so it is with all of them sporting felliers like Chack Dempsey and Baby Ruthstein. If there was no gate reseats them felliers would be all loining a trade so they could get it a chob somewhere.

It is the same way with Texas Rickardstein, the great box fighting promoter. I esked him only the other day what it was which attractioned him into the box fighting game when he had a nice salooning business in Nevada. "Izzy," he told me, "this is confidential between me and you, and you shouldn't told nobody. It was the gate reseats that attractioned me."

Texas Rickardstein should know something about gate reseats on account the gate reseats of the Chack Dempsey-George Carpetstein fight alone was worth over a million and a halui dillars. It would almost make a feller cry now to read how Chim Corbett and Chee Choynski had it a box fighting on a Secremento River canal boat with no box reseats at all. Chee Choynski's old man, which he was a business man from Russia, like myselui, never forgave Chee for the feolishness. But it wasn't Chee's fault, on account gate reseats hadn't been inventioned yet.

I could remember back to the days when Abie Attell was a champeen box fighter. There was a business man. Before he would go into the ring he would always esk the feller which was promotioning the show: "How much is the gate reseats?" And Abie wouldn't take the feller's werd for it, neither. Abie was too smart. Before he



HE WOULD ALWAYS COUNT THE HOUSE HIMSELUF.

would hit the other feller a smash on the chin he would always count the house himseluf while the box fighting was going on.

Besides being a very smart business man Abie also was a very smart box fighter. The other feller would be trying to hit him a poke in the eye, but Abie could duck his head and keep on counting. He never would let anybody give him a blue eye on account that would interfere with counting the house and getting the figgers exact.

Wunst I heard him talking to a feller who was giving him a calling down and saying: "Come on and fight, Abie." And Abie said right back to him: "I ain't finished counting the seliery yet, but when I do I will bit you a good smash on the chin."

And sure enuch I heard Abie talking to himseluf and saying: "There is one thousand and eighty-two dollars in that seliery, and the promoter tells me it wouldn't be more than seven hundred dollars. He is a swindler, and I will have his life. I got to hurry up the fight because I am not giving him eight rounds of box fighting for [illegible]"

Then Abie reached out the right hand and I hit the other box fighter on the chin. He didn't even stop to hear the referee counting him out on account he wanted to meet the promoter outside and have him count the house over. I think that Abie Attell is the smartest business man that they ever had in the box fighting business. Maybe he was too smart. It is sometimes so that a feller could be too smart for his own good. I am so smart myselui that sometimes it really gets me worried.

It is too bad nobody knows who is the feller that inventioned the gate reseats.

If they did they would have a statue of him in every backalley lot in Chicago and in the country, or if they wouldn't they ought. You could get a statue for pretty cheap by any of these Dyckman fellers, which only the other day one of them offered to sell me three for a dollar, but they wasn't statues of anybody that I knew.

You could picture for yourself the story but I can't. But the pie feature was first investigated. A lot of fellers is in a field box fighting and backalling and the customers is standing there for nothing. Then this smart feller comes along and he gives a look and he sees all the customers and nobody is charging any admission.

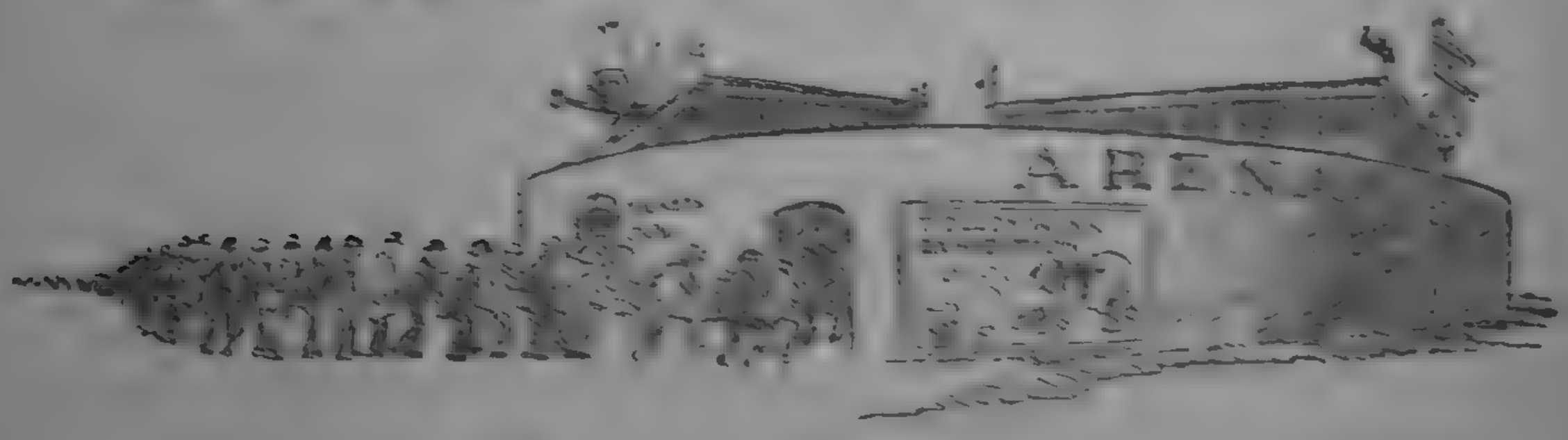
Of course he must have been a feller from Russia because that is where all the good business ideas like letting an alleyway do your work for you, then selling somebody comes from. He is standing there thinking with his brains that is under his hair. Finally he gets a notion on a lot of lumber and he builds it a fence around and the fellers where is the backalling and the box fighting, and he sends his brother Mose out to collection from the customers at the gate.

At first the customers puts up a holler. Customers would always holler a little until they get used to it. After a while they wouldn't holler at all. They would walk right up to the gate and act sore if you wouldn't take their money. Why, you could even read about fellers suing a theayter for not taking their money.

That is really how sports got to be a business and why they developed such smart box fellers like Bennie Leonard and Chuck Dempsey, and backalling fellers like Chas. McGraw and Baby Rubstein. If it wasn't for the gate receipts there wouldn't be no sports at all in this country. Everybody would be in amachure, and a customer would have nothing at all to do with his money.

Gate receipts for everything is getting bigger and bigger every year. You couldn't see the end of them yet because they haven't really begun to commence starting. You could get gate receipts for anything if you only got the brains. I am telling that I could commence a scheme right in the New Road and sell out the lots on account you know I am all the time thinking up ideas myself.

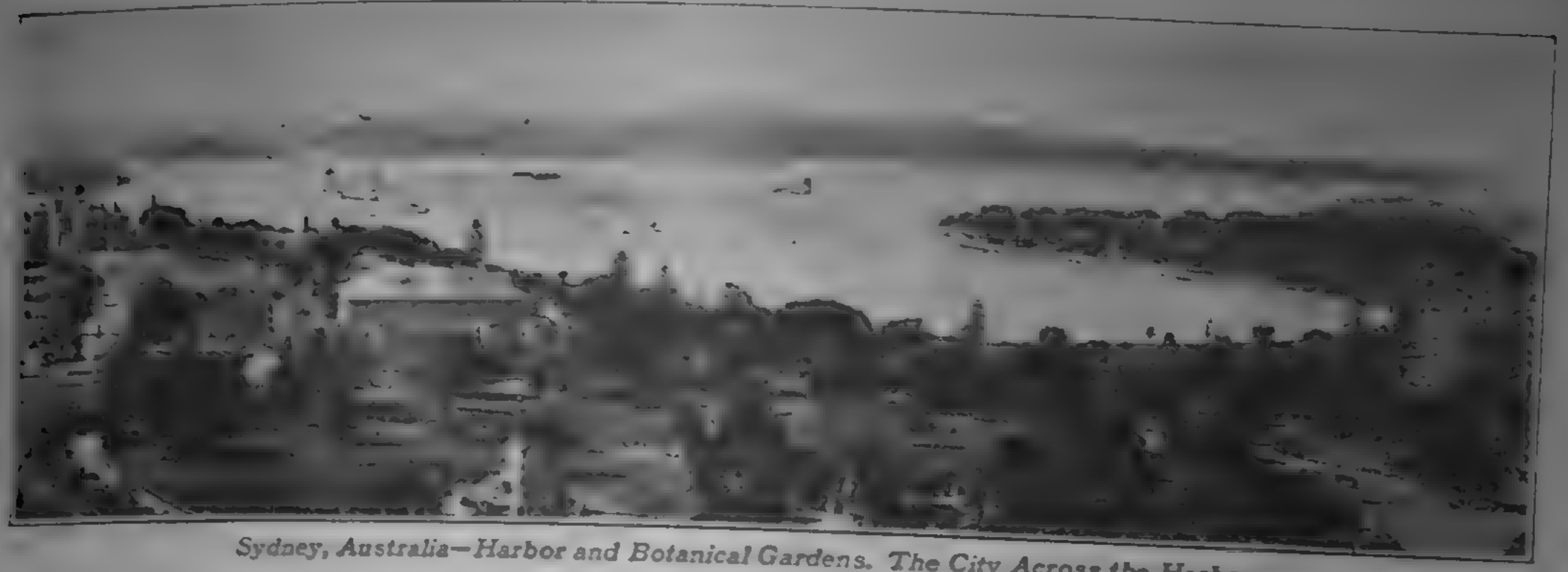
Next Week Izzy Kaplan will comment upon THE SPORT OF KINGS.



OUT OF PLACE

A [illegible]
Shall be regarded right.
Teacher Liberty's statue [illegible].
Till it shed silver tears
A full man—in the U. S. A.—
It doesn't seem just right.

Margaret G. Hays.



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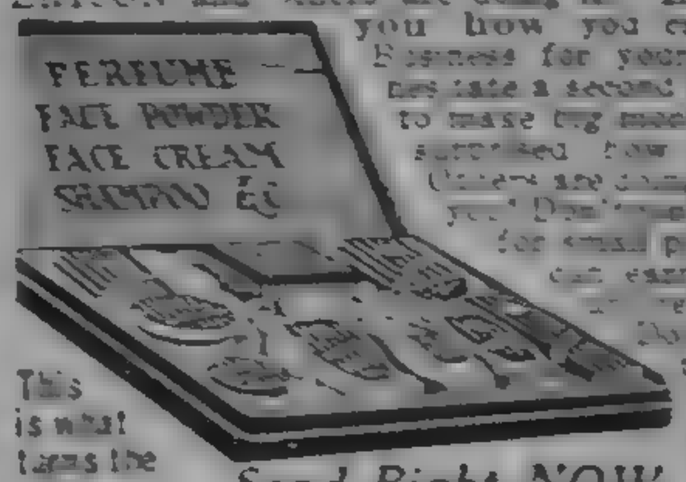

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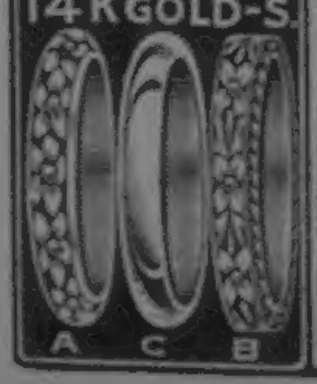

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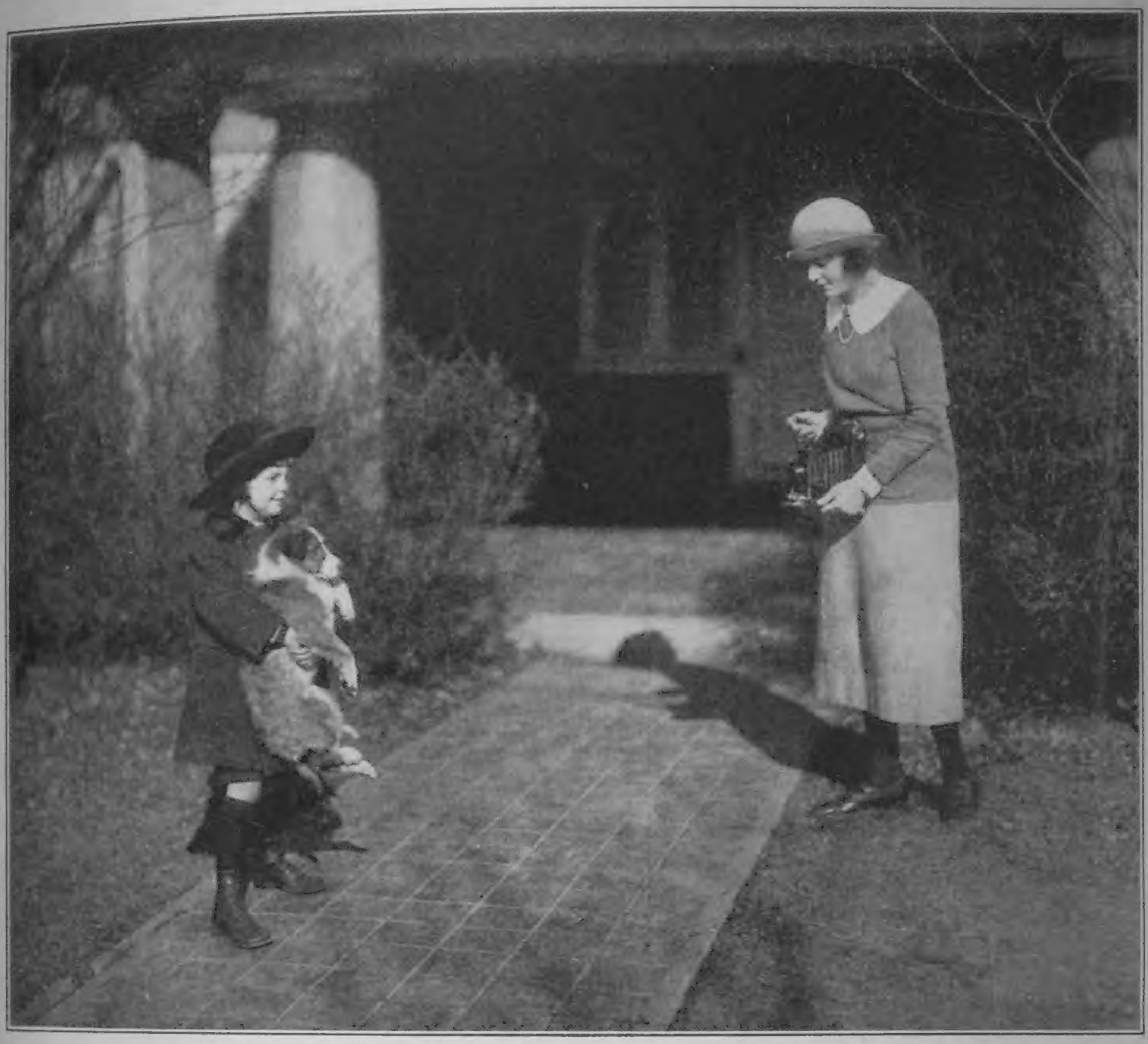

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Free!

A Silver Bon Bon Basket FREE with this Complete 26 Piece Silver Set

26 Big

Beautiful, Useful Pieces

Genuine "Community Made":

6 Dinner Knives, 6 Dinner Forks, 6 Teaspoons, 6 Table Spoons, 1 Butter Knife, 1 Sugar Shell—All Doubly Guaranteed 20 Years

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The beautifully decorative and aristocratic design, and the high quality of these 26 Big Useful Pieces of Silver make them unusually desirable. The set is Genuine "Community Made." It is the guaranteed product of the world-famous silversmiths of the Oneida Community, makers of the well known, higher priced Community Plate. Every piece bears the Community trade-mark. So you are certain of refinement and correctness of design, abundantly satisfactory quality and enduring wear. Each piece is full regulation dinner size—much larger than is shown in the illustration. Another important advantage to you in this offer is my very low price, the Easy terms, and the Free Bon Bon Basket if you order promptly. The complete set—26 Pieces—will be sent to use as your own on 30 Days' Free Trial. If your satisfaction is not complete you may return it. Your first payments and all transportation costs will be refunded. The trial will not cost you a penny. **Order No. PA2447. Terms: $1 with order, $1 Monthly. Total Price Only $14.95.**

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Send me at once the 26 piece Silver Set, Leatherette Case and Free Bon Bon Basket. Enclosed is $1.00 first payment. It is understood that if at the end of the 30 days' trial I am satisfied, I will send you $1.00 monthly. Order No. PA2447. Total price, $14.95. Title remains with you until paid in full. Send me your Big Free Catalog also.

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If you will send your order for the Silver Set quickly I will send you Absolutely Free a very handsome Bon Bon and General Utility Basket. It is made of hard metal, quadruple plated with Pure Silver and lined with 24 karat Gold that is lacquered to prevent tarnish and discolor. The handle is detachable. This is an article you will be glad to own. Remember it is Absolutely Free if you order the Silver Set promptly.

NATHANIEL SPEAR, President

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